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ABSTRACT

Noting the improvement that has occurred in the teaching of writing since the introduction of the process approach to instruction, this book offers suggestions for still more improvement and for solving the problems that arise in the teaching of writing. The first section of the book stresses the importance of letting children write and of building a curriculum on writing, while the second section discusses the various stages of the writing process and how they can be incorporated into a balanced writing program. The third section reviews writing topics, detailing the problems of imposed topics and the secrets of successful ones. In addition, this section offers suggestions for assisting children in developing their topics in a number of subject areas. The fourth section discusses the conference approach to writing, stressing both its difficulties and its strengths. The fifth section poses 10 questions teachers should ask about writing, including: (1) What is the importance of writing? (2) What differences are there between speech and writing? (3) What are the stages in writing development? and (4) How can poetry writing be taught? The sixth section contains six special studies dealing with children's writing, and the last section offers tips for writing teachers in the areas of language usage, grammar, and style. (FL)

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Every Child Can Write!

Learning and teaching written expression in the 1980s

R. D. Walshe
Publications Editor
Primary English Teaching Association

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Acknowledgments

In 1969 I set myself the immoderate task of trying to follow every significant book, journal and article on the teaching of writing that appeared in the United States, Britain and Australia; but around 1976-7 that ambition had to give way to a relatively lame 'doing my best' as I began to feel overwhelmed by the sharp upturn in writing research which is currently being termed an 'upsurge', a 'renaissance' or a 'revolution'.

How is it possible to acknowledge specifically one's debts when so many sources have influenced one's views across more than a decade of reading? Yet I must mention two American mentors, Donald M. Murray and Donald H. Graves, whose work I invariably find absorbing because it perfectly blends advancing theory and advancing practice: they are 'writers teaching writing' on a frontier that is restless with change and aspiration.

Nearer home, I was educated throughout the seventies by the sessions of the Sydney Teachers Writing Group and by the adult writing classes at Sutherland Shire Evening College. This year, the thirty teachers involved in the St George ('conference approach') Writing Experiment have helped me more than they can possibly know.

Specific thanks for generous help with parts of the manuscript or production of *Every Child Can Write!* are due to Roslyn Arnold, Trevor Cairney, Laurel Dumbrell, Dorothy Dunphy, Barry Dwyer, Elaine Furniss, Terry Jeff, Tony Moore, Norman McCulla, John Rough, Jan Gilmore-Smith, Les Speirs, Jim Thomson, Jan Turbill, Judith Walker and Ken Watson.

R.D.W.

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Writing's New Direction — World-wide!

- '. . . a wave of writing reform is sweeping through schools, colleges and businesses all over the U.S.'—*Time*, 19 May, 1980.
- 'America's concern for writing is being echoed in most advanced countries . . . we can fortunately draw on relatively recent research findings—books and articles of the late sixties and the seventies—that enable us to start putting together *a new vision, first, of the importance of writing, and, second, of the ways writing-happens*—that is, of the best ways to learn it and the best ways to teach it.'— R.D. Walshe, address to First N.S.W. Conference of Talented Student Writers, at University of N.S.W., Sydney, 24 October, 1980.
- '. . . there has been a lot of hard thinking about the teaching of writing in particular in North America recently . . . and the work of such Canadians and Americans as Bryant Fillion and Donald Graves needs to be much better known in this country than it is at present.'—Anthony Adams, Chairman, National Association for the Teaching of English, U.K., in *English Education*, Summer 1980.
- 'The most important development in the teaching of writing during the seventies was the growing acceptance of the concept of process, that the complex act of writing could not be understood by retrospective analysis of a completed piece of writing, but only by studying—and teaching—the entire process of making: rehearsing, drafting, and revising.'—Donald M. Murray, University of New Hampshire, in *Language Arts* (N.C.T.E.), May, 1980.
- *Renaissance* is a strong word; I do not use it lightly . . . But a *renaissance* is precisely what composition as an academic subject is experiencing at the present time . . . More and more, educators and laypeople are coming to see that writing will be essential in the highly technological world of tomorrow.'—Richard L. Graves, in *Phi Delta Kappan*, February, 1981.

A New Era in School Writing

We are observing a world-wide awakening to the importance of writing. The quotations opposite testify to that. Writing is being seen as more than a skill, more than an instrument; it is increasingly perceived to be central to the school learning process, significant in the social and personal life of the individual, and indispensable in many ways to modern society.

This new awareness has caused a quickening of changes in the teaching of writing, changes that began fairly unobtrusively in the mid-1960s. Until then the essential approach to writing had remained static for centuries: 'Here is your topic. Now, remembering the skills I've shown you, take up your pens and produce a correct composition which I will collect and mark' . . . After all, how could school writing be anything but an artificial exercise?

But that approach *was* challenged, and now the teaching of writing is changing more rapidly than any other part of the curriculum. Guiding this change is a principle: 'If we teachers study the *process* by which writers produce real writing, we will discover how to teach writing better.'

Attention focused at first on the 'pre-writing' and 'drafting' stages of the writing process—with encouraging results. Then it widened in the seventies to the 'revision and polishing' stage. Now, in the eighties, there are signs that it is widening further as teachers sense the relevance of a 'post-writing' stage. Post-writing? Yes, the 'publication' of the writing, the search for real readers, the response from those readers, and the effects of the response on the writer's next piece of writing.

The contention of this book[1] is that while the teaching of writing has notably improved in classrooms where the 'process' ideas of pre-writing/drafting/revising have been tried, greater things are yet to come. Given keen attention to 'post-writing', given its integration into the concept and practice of 'process', we will fully enter in the 1980s the new era of real and purposeful writing whose outline we began to glimpse in the mid-sixties. Moreover, the teaching of writing and reading will then be closely linked at last in a healthy balance.

Of course, the book deals with many other issues. It has to be a book for all seasons, offering practical materials to teachers whatever their approach to writing may be. On only one issue is it dogmatic: we teachers need to do *some* writing along with the children. We will be more effective teachers of writing for doing so.

For the rest, the book tries to help with all the important problems of teaching writing. It has a primary school focus but it should be readily adaptable by teachers across the K-12 range.

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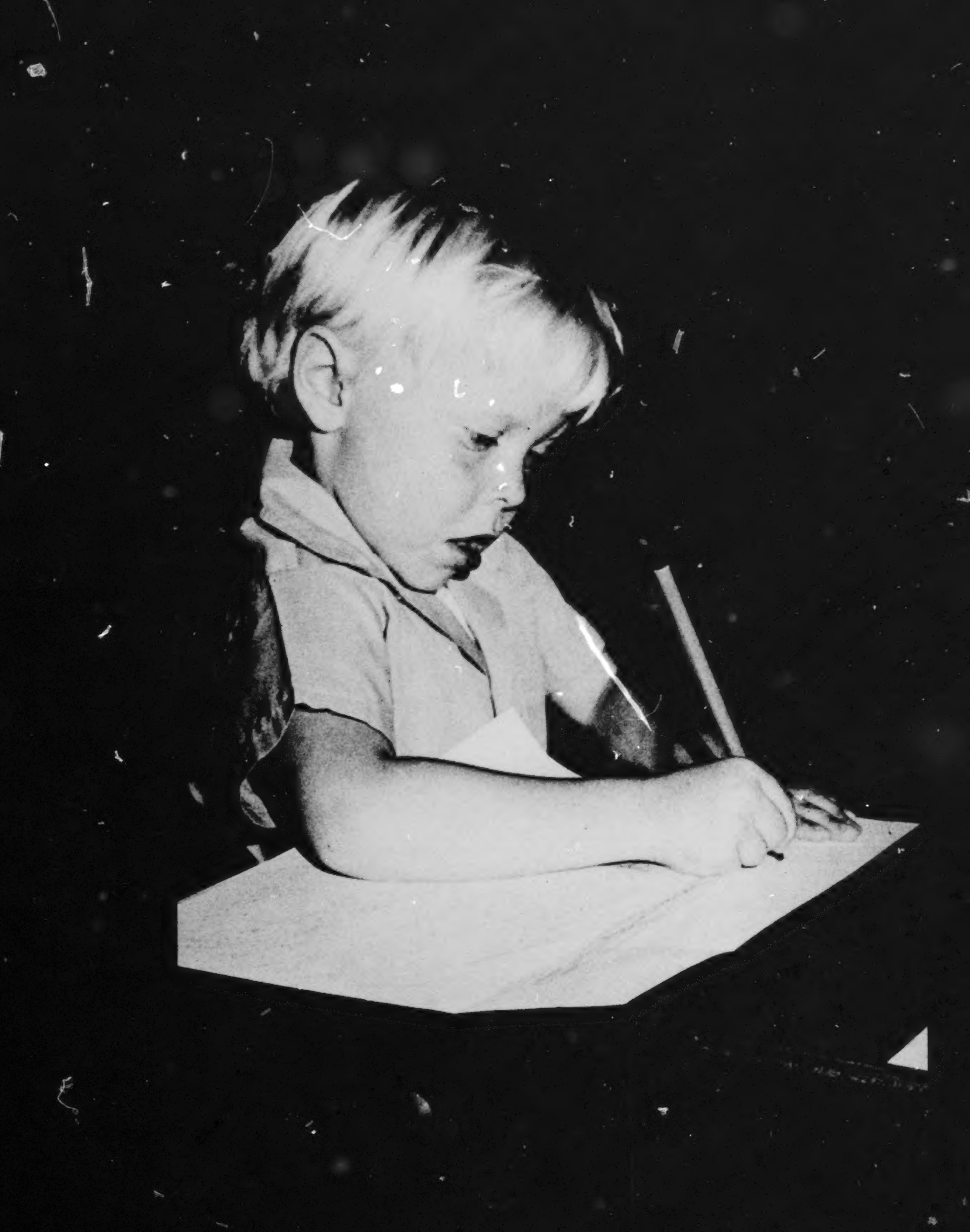
[1] See especially pages 46-52.



PART I:

Let Them Write!

— Basic strategy for teaching writing

A simple first principle?

Where should a book on the teaching of writing begin?

E.D. Hirsch begins his important *Philosophy of Composition* (1977) with an epigram from the nineteenth century philosopher-educationist Herbert Spencer:

> The maxims contained in works on composition and rhetoric are presented in an unorganised form. Standing as isolated dogmas—as empirical generalisations, they are neither so clearly apprehended, nor so much respected, as they would be were they deduced from some simple first principle. (*The Philosophy of Style*, 1852)

Hirsch, in search of a principle that will guide his tertiary students to a good prose style, fastens on what he calls 'relative readability', by which he means that 'one prose style is better than another when it communicates the same meanings as the other does but requires less effort from the reader'.

Helpful though this view is, it will not excite teachers who are concerned with producing the elementary literacy of the primary school. For teaching at this level I propose a more immediately relevant first principle, namely, LET THEM WRITE—it is the necessary antidote to seldom writing and exercise writing and writing that 'fills in the blanks'.

For we now know that language is more learned than taught; that while some things about writing need to be taught, many more need to be learned *by discovery* in action, in frequent use, across a range of situations that are full of meaning for the learner.

So the dictum LET THEM WRITE will safeguard the main need of primary children in learning to write. Moreover, Hirsch's admirable principle can be added at an early stage. At six or seven, after gaining control of the obvious elements of the writing 'code', children can begin to be told: 'Especially when we polish our work we should think about our readers and make every sentence as clear and lively for them as we can'.

Basic strategy: LET THEM WRITE!

Perhaps 'let them write' seems too simple or too permissive to cope with the complexity of 'the writing problem'? But it is put forward as *the basic strategy* for teaching writing, not the whole campaign. Much of course needs to be added—and that 'much' is what the rest of this book is about.

LET THEM WRITE can be the teacher's guiding principle from the child's first day at school, the necessary corrective to lingering old restraints which keep children from writing about their real concerns while holding them to a lean diet of copying and exercises. (See 'Beginning Writing', p. 147.) It is a strategy which has to operate within the context of a school system that is anything but permissive, a system that demands writing of children, directs a teacher to monitor it, and expects conformity to the conventions of written language.

LET THEM WRITE is a modern reassertion of the most profound ancient insight into how writing can be learned. The Romans, borrowing no doubt from the Greek originators of writing-as-craft, expressed this insight neatly:

Scribendo disces scribere.

'By writing we learn to write' It is a principle that has been corroborated by a great deal of recent linguistic research, especially by psycholinguists such as Kenneth Goodman. And it is refined by that most insightful of today's writing teachers, Donald M. Murray, when he states as the essence of his approach: '. . . we teach our students to write by allowing them to experience the process of writing.' This book will have a great deal to say about that process and how teachers can nurture it.

With more to discover than to imitate—
LET THEM WRITE! For by writing they learn to write.

The Romans put discovery-learning at the centre of *Scribendo disces scribere,* for they perceived that the greater part of learning to write is a self-discovery task, not an imitation of adult models. But doesn't a great deal have to be *taught* about writing? Well, let us look at what is teachable.

The 'teachables' of writing

A teacher can instruct/exercise/drill children in three areas:

1 . . . the alphabet, handwriting, punctuation, spelling
 —these are most of the so-called 'mechanics' of writing;
2 . . . the half-dozen items of grammar that writers need to know
 —discussed in Part V, p. 164;
3 . . . various 'craft issues'
 — assorted formalities of construction and usage (see p. 223).

Teachable these matters certainly are by exposition and exercises, but even they can mostly be *discovered* by a child who makes an effort to write and read. After all, so many of them crop up continually in whatever one writes (and reads). So a workable teaching strategy is: Instead of trying to convey these 'teachables' through unavoidably dull exercises, allow each child to write at his or her individual level about real concerns and then the teacher and classmates can draw attention to weaknesses of mechanics, grammar and craft as they appear. In short, LET THEM WRITE, and only then *teach at the point of revealed need* — individually where possible, or to a group that has a common problem, and occasionally to the whole class.

What children must discover for themselves

The things a child can only discover about writing *by writing itself* are much more numerous and often more profound that those 'teachables', yet traditional teaching of writing almost completely underrated them.

Writing is in essence a more careful *thinking* than we can manage while talking or reflecting; and children can only learn to think in this unaccustomed way through years of persistent writing. *They* have to discover how to generate, gather and smoothly connect strictly relevant ideas, holding them in mind while the hand—so slow compared to the tongue—scribes them relatively laboriously. *They* have to master the disciplines of writing alone, of getting started effectively, of giving each piece its own context, of developing the ideas in logical sequence, of being concise, of maintaining a consistent voice, of appealing to a specific audience, of ending strongly, and of waiting till later for a response. Moreover, since writing is expected to be polished, each child must discover his or her own 'process' of moving from rather messy drafting ('first thoughts') through revision to the polished form. If we hold children to exercises performed mechanically, we deny them the opportunity to *learn by writing* all these 'discoverables' or 'learnables.' 'Fundamentally,' says author-linguist Anthony Powell, 'you have to learn to write alone.'

The teacher's important role: classroom management

The point in putting 'learnables' ahead of 'teachables' is not to downgrade the teacher's role but to show clearly what that role is. In brief: as well as conveying those 'teachables', the teacher makes his or her most significant contribution through skilful and inspiring classroom management of writing—building a 'writing community' in which the children write willingly and thoughtfully and so chiefly learn to write by writing itself.

The next two pages try to summarise the rest of the book by outlining the 'essential simplicities' of teaching and learning writing.

WRITER
CRAFT
IDEAS
READERS

Trying to See the Whole Writing Picture

Teaching. A well-managed purposeful classroom in which the teacher continually promotes the IMPORTANCE OF WRITING and demonstrates conviction by providing ample time for writing and by sometimes joining in.

Learning. Opened to writing by the teacher's enthusiastic attitude and persuaded by positive arguments about the importance of writing in learning, the child is ready to write willingly and purposefully.

Teaching. Classroom routines cultivate frequent practice of the full PROCESS OF WRITING or 'cycle of craft', from rough draft to polished quality: 'We write well in this class and help one another to solve technical problems.'

Learning. Writing frequently and in the craft spirit, the child increasingly discovers his or her individual 'process', especially gaining confidence through revising for quality.

Teaching. The classroom climate 'expects' a QUANTITY OF WRITING ('by writing one learns to write') across a range of purposes and forms, and the child is encouraged to originate many of the topics.

Learning. Carried along by the classroom's expectations, the child writes day by day on a variety of subjects and in many forms, including much self-chosen and fully-authored writing.

Teaching. The classroom writing community, as readers, validate the child-as-writer by warm RESPONSE TO WRITING, first to message, second to form. Classmates and teacher guarantee the child an interested readership.

Learning. The child is stimulated by the response to his or her productions. This is regular individual reinforcing of the classroom's overall flowing purpose to write well.

Abundant reading and purposeful talk interweave continually with the writing.

In Quest of 'The Essential Simplicities' of Teaching/Learning Writing

across the years of primary schooling

Classroom Environment for Writing

Teachers who accept the general principle that *language is more learned than taught* attach great importance to providing a classroom which influences children to want to write, supports them while they are writing, and responds positively to what they write.

- **The Physical Environment**

Teachers arrange their classrooms in a host of ways. This is not the place to discuss the merits of different arrangements. Let us simply assume that the room has some focus for writing and reading, perhaps a 'Writing and Reading Corner' or 'Books and Writing Centre'. (There are good reasons for keeping the two sides of literacy together!) Set up with the children's participation in planning and operating, it might contain:

.. pencils, crayons, felt pens, erasers, rulers
.. paper, lined and unlined, in different sizes and colours
.. a large dictionary and several smaller ones
.. other reference books, e.g. atlas, encyclopedia, phone books
.. bookshelves, carrying the class's library
.. pupil-authored books as well as the adult-authored ones
.. regular bulk-borrowings from the school library
.. magazines and newspapers
.. a looseleaf folder with 'Pictures for Writing'
.. a box of magazines for cutting-out
.. a 'Topic-Box' full of (optional) bright ideas
.. appropriate wallcharts, including local productions
.. bulletin boards; and, if possible, a pupils' chalkboard
.. a classroom 'Mail Box'
.. a tape recorder, a cassette player
.. a typewriter (donated) for 'typing for publication'
.. book-making materials: light cardboard, etc.
.. stapler, scissors, paste, hole-punch, thread
.. wastebasket
.. large table (round, if possible) and chairs
.. bean bags and cushions
.. folding screen(s), for privacy

The arrangement changes periodically to avoid staleness.

- **The Working Environment**

As the child enters the classroom each day to engage in learning activities, he or she feels 'environment pressure' from four main sources:

1. *The Physical Environment*, discussed opposite.

2. *The Teacher*, as person, professional and power-source. Many studies of classroom-influences on learning have concluded, 'It's the teacher that makes the difference!'—though not, of course, all the difference. A teacher who handles writing well

.. speaks up for the importance of writing in learning and life
.. respects the children, whatever their difficulties with writing
.. guarantees the order needed for attentive, purposeful writing
.. provides ample time, knowing writing to be central in learning
.. is accessible and helpful, a good listener, reader, questioner
.. participates, knowing writing is a craft, which, like any other craft, needs to be modelled for the learners by a craftsperson who works alongside them and sometimes writes with them.

3. *The Children*. Their collective ('peergroup') attitude strongly influences the attitude of individual children. So the teacher works to achieve

.. their positive acceptance of writing; especially
.. their understanding that writing is central in learning
.. their readiness to help one another with writing problems
.. their willingness to serve as 'writing partners'
.. their ability to respond to one another's writing
.. their feeling of confidence that every writing problem can be solved.

4. *The Work*. 'There is no point in work,' said D.H. Lawrence, 'unless it absorbs you like an absorbing game.' Too ideal for the classroom? Still, the appeal of the topics for writing is certainly going to influence the children's attitude to writing. So the teacher

.. encourages personal choice of 'experience' topics
.. helps children to find topics when they feel a 'block'
.. allows a degree of choice even in the 'content areas'
.. promotes wide reading, and a balance of reading and writing
.. provides interesting activities ('a classroom on the go')
.. knows writing flourishes in the midst of varied creative expression (choral speaking, drama, painting, music, etc.).

Total Environment. It is a workshop or studio environment: 'Decide what *you* want to write (make/do), then start self-reliantly to write (build it/do it), and I will be working alongside you, ready to help with whatever new skill you find you need.' . . . And in time these children, learning language by using, using, using it in meaningful work, will become a 'writing community' full of energy, confidence, mutual support and flair.

Don't Stop Them Writing!

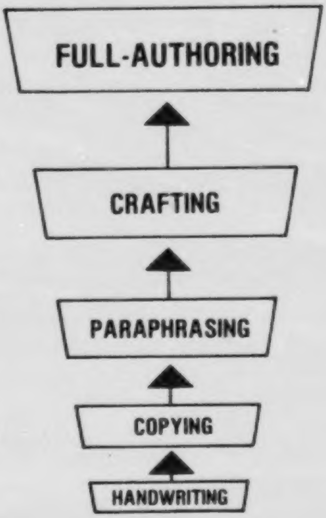
Of course you wouldn't! No teacher would.

BUT what is your definition of writing? Unless writing is conceived widely, a teacher may unconsciously limit children's opportunities to write—and in this sense 'stop them writing'.

'Writing' has been defined[1] in an ascending scale of authorship to show its full range:

Writing is . . .?

1. *Handwriting.* This is the lowest definition of writing; and, indeed, some people do think that there is little more to writing than 'a good hand'.
2. *Copying.* This is writing which merely reproduces other people's ideas from book or blackboard, or transcribes speech from 'dictation', requiring only the mechanical abilities of handwriting, spelling and punctuation.
3. *Paraphrasing.* This is writing which needs at least some authoring: 'Don't just copy; try to use your own words.' The writer modifies text to produce notes, summaries, book reports, precis, 'projects', etc. This makes heavier demands on ability to read than on ability to write.
4. *Crafting.* This is 'composition'-style writing, customarily on prescribed topics. Concentrating on form/how-to/construction, it seldom gets beneath the surface to take an interest in the content or 'message'.



What Writing Is

5. *Full-authoring.* This alone is writing which is genuinely *thinking*—one's own ideas, arrangement and expression, fully 'owned' by the writer; in short, original.

. . . 'Writing' may take any of these five forms, BUT the only writing that incorporates all of them is fully authored writing.

Conclusion. The teacher who realises the significance for thinking-learning-writing of maximising every child's full-authoring opportunities, soon puts an end to the old order of 'composition' teaching . . . The children begin to find their own topics, control their own writing, and write for real purposes and real readers, helped by a teacher who learns to cope with a changed problem of classroom management and is rewarded by the release of fresh learning energy.

---

[1] James Moffett, 'Integrity in the Teaching of Writing', in *Phi Delta Kappan*, December, 1979, pp. 276-9.

Because writing is the deepest thinking one can do, and because it is central to learning . . .

Why not build your whole curriculum on writing?

You can start the year by talking with your children about their deepest interests, then say, 'Find a topic among these interests and write so the whole class can read about it.'

. . . *Your curriculum is launched!*

Then say, 'Look at our room. It's so bare! Let's start to fill it with things we're interested in . . . That must include really polishing our writing and turning it into books for the classroom library. While we're doing so we can borrow a range of books from the school library — in fact, let's go now and make a first selection.'

. . . *Your writing and reading program is well under way!*

You have completely individualised your curriculum. Every child is working at his or her own level, writing and reading without any need of textbooks. The children's explorations (and yours) can lead to all the Language, Social Studies, Science, Maths, Health, Art, Craft, etc. they need or can absorb.

Trust writing! It is central to learning. It will lead your class through a packed, purposeful and lively curriculum, as nothing else can.

PART II:

Understanding the Writing Process

• Writing defined

This is the comprehensive 'operational definition of writing' devised by the Committee on Writing Standards of U.S. National Council of Teachers of English.

Writing is the process of selecting, combining, arranging, and developing ideas in effective sentences, paragraphs, and, often, longer units of discourse.

The process requires the writer to cope with a number of variables: *method of development* (narrating, explaining, describing, reporting, and persuading); *tone* (from very personal to quite formal); *form* (from a limerick to a formal letter to a long research report); *purpose* (from discovering and expressing personal feelings and values to conducting the impersonal 'business' of everyday life); *possible audiences* (oneself, classmates, a teacher, 'the world').

Learning to write and to write increasingly well involves developing increasing skill and sensitivity in selecting from and combining these variables to shape particular messages.

It also involves learning to conform to conventions of the printed language, appropriate to the age of the writer and to the form, purpose, and tone of the message.

Beyond the pragmatic purpose of shaping messages to others, writing can be a means of self-discovery, of finding out what we believe, know, and cannot find words or circumstances to say to others. Writing can be a deeply personal act of shaping our perception of the world and our relationships to people and things in that world. Thus, writing serves both public and personal needs of students, and it warrants the full, generous, and continuing effort of all teachers . . .

Not an Act but a Process

Writing takes time. If it is rushed, many children feel they cannot get control of it; they begin to say, 'I don't like writing'. So writing needs a generous allocation of classroom time. This should be agreed to by school principals, for they will know that as well as being half of literacy, and as well as occupying a central position in the learning process itself, writing is the only craft that the school system is required to succeed in teaching to the whole generation of children. Like every other craft, writing needs frequent and thoughtful practice if skill is to emerge.

Obviously, children should never be pushed into 'instant writing'. Yet in the past that was what often happened; they were required to write 'compositions' which were one-shot drafts executed at a single sitting and passed in for 'marking' without any revision except a hasty 'proofreading'.

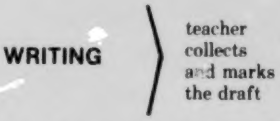
In the 1970s a better understanding of the nature of writing began to spread in Australia, and now in the eighties it is spreading rapidly. Instead of being treated as a hurried one-shot *act*, writing is seen as a multi-stage *process*—or 'cycle of craft' or 'sequence of composing behaviours'—which means that a writer needs time and opportunity to rehearse a topic in the mind, draft it on paper, revise it until the meaning is clear, and then write it out for despatch to the intended reader.

This view of *writing as process* has universal application, being true for everyone who attempts to write effectively and true for all writing above the level of the dashed-off-note or thoughts-scribbled-down. At the same time, 'process' is not to be taken as a rigid prescription which binds all writers to an invariant sequence of craft procedures; on the contrary, it is a flexible conception which allows plenty of room for individual differences.

Allowing, then, for such differences, we can say that in every real situation—as distinct from exercises—writing will pass through a more or less protracted 'process', and that this will be as true for beginners as for professionals, for 'slow' students as for 'bright', for persons struggling with English as for those who are at home in it.

Writing: a Multi-Stage Process

(1) Traditionally, writing has usually been a one-shot act:
('Here is your topic. Now, remembering the skills I've shown you, take up your pens and produce a correct composition which I will mark.')


WRITING
teacher collects and marks the draft

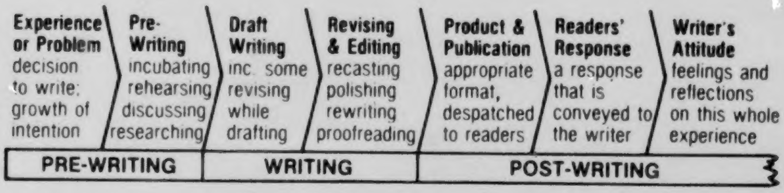
N.B. Both the *Pre-writing* (including the devising of a topic and its 'motivation', if any) and *Post-writing* (including the correction and marking and the response, if any) were the responsibility of the teacher.

(2) In the 1970s a view of 'the writing process' spread:
('Let us give a lot of thought to this topic before we start writing; you can then do a draft, which is likely to be fairly rough; and then you can polish and rewrite it.')

PRE-WRITING
DRAFT-WRITING
RE-WRITING

N.B. This early concept of process was justly hailed as a liberation from one-shot writing; but if it was treated as a hurried, three-step mechanical exercise it could degenerate into a new 'classroom tyranny'—especially if the children were compelled to revise writing in which they had no interest, having not experienced proper pre-writing preparation nor been allowed some degree of topic choice.

(3) In the 1980s a deeper understanding of 'process' is spreading:
('Real writing takes place within a context—a *Writing Situation* [over]—which compels the writer's attention not only to the writing but also to the many factors surrounding it, especially the needs of readers.')

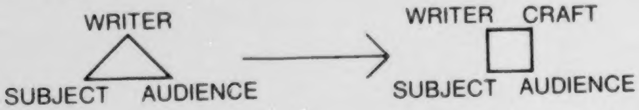

Experience or Problem
decision to write; growth of intention
Pre-Writing
incubating rehearsing discussing researching
Draft Writing
inc. some revising while drafting
Revising & Editing
recasting polishing rewriting proofreading
Product & Publication
appropriate format, despatched to readers
Readers' Response
a response that is conveyed to the writer
Writer's Attitude
feelings and reflections on this whole experience
PRE-WRITING
WRITING
POST-WRITING

N.B. All these factors are real to every writer, so the teacher needs to make them the subject of continuing classroom discussion. Only a teacher who sometimes joins the class in writing is likely to be sensitive to all of them . . . Anyway, isn't example the best way to teach?

The Writing Situation

Since Aristotle[1] explored this issue nearly two and a half thousand years ago there has been general acceptance of his view that every piece of writing results from a compounding of three elements: *writer, subject, audience.* But apart from usefully calling a writer's attention to the importance of the audience this triangle model of the writing situation has done little to help the teaching of writing.

Why? Because it has failed to give weight to what the student *writer* is usually most concerned with, namely *HOW to go about* writing up the *subject* so that it reads persuasively to the *audience.* In other words, Aristotle left out a fourth element that is vital in the writing situation—the how-to, or technique, or (let us call it) *craft.*[2] Craft is the means by which a writer selects and arranges ideas in order to inform or persuade an audience. So Aristotle's triangle model needs to be developed as a square:



A modified and expanded model is presented opposite.

The teacher who takes the trouble to memorise these four elements acquires a powerful checklist or guide for monitoring classroom writing. Every aspect of the classroom writing situation or context can be grouped under one or other of the four heads. Then the comprehensiveness and balance of a specific writing experience can be checked at the planning stage and watched throughout the ensuing 'process'.

An Example of the Model's Usefulness. Unbalanced approaches to teaching writing can be swiftly spotted:

Oversimplification 1 . . . In the WRITER corner: 'Self-expression is what matters; correction can be inhibiting; just let creativity flow, and they'll learn to write expressively.'

Oversimplification 2 . . . In the SUBJECT corner: 'It's ideas that matter—research, facts and arguments. If they study the subject thoroughly they'll be able to write knowledgably.'

Oversimplification 3 . . . In the CRAFT corner: 'Correctness is what matters; so continually drill the basics of grammar, usage, punctuation and spelling and they'll be able to write correctly.'

Oversimplification 4 . . . In the AUDIENCE corner: 'Communication is what matters; so ask them to take a leaf from the advertiser's book: study the audience, learn to write for various audiences, and they'll be able to write persuasively.'

Each viewpoint is true — but not nearly true enough! A balance is needed; not necessarily in every piece of classroom writing but certainly over the period of a course.

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[1] *Aristotle's Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (Oxford 1924), 1358b.

[2] For further discussion, see 'A Model of the Writing Situation', by R.D. Walshe, in *College Composition and Communication* (N.C.T.E.), Dec. 1977, pp. 384-6.

The Writing Situation[1]

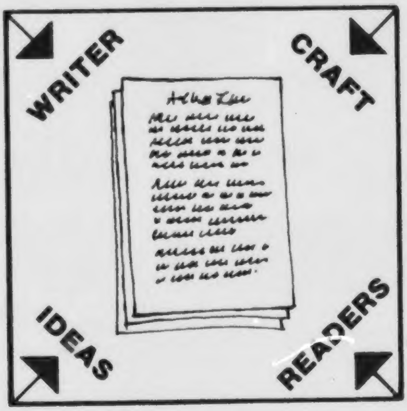
'I **(writer)** intend to persuade you **(readers)** of the importance of *x* **(ideas)** and will do so in *y* form **(craft).**'

- **A Unique Individual**

a complex self (ego)
an urge to self-expression
a desire for approval
an attitude to writing
an interest in the topic
a purpose or intention in writing
emotional involvement
time given to writing

- **Techniques to be Applied**

genre and form
voice and tone
vocabulary, usage
conventions: handwriting, spelling, punctuation
grammar/syntax
process:
  — prewriting
  — drafting
  — revising
  — proofreading
  — publishing



a problem
random thoughts
memory
intuitions
imagination
notes
reading and research
exploratory talk/listening
incubation of ideas

- **A Chaos of Subject-matter**

Robert Frost: 'Everything written is as good as it is dramatic.' — That is, as good as it is clear, lively and attention-holding *for the readers*.

who, precisely?
  oneself
  classmates
  juniors
  teacher
  parents
  others
their interests, needs?

- **Persons to be Persuaded**

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[1] The 'situation' here is principally that of any writer who is facing up to a job of writing, but the model is also effective for all later stages of the writing process. Aristotle's famous 'communication triangle', by contrast, omits reference to 'craft' and has for this reason been unhelpful in all the stages of process which lie between intention-to-write and the finished-ready-for-publication writing.

Basic Elements of Writing?

Teachers are continually evaluating children's writing. That means judging how well the child has blended the elements that enter into the writing situation. But there are so many of these elements! It is easy to get lost. Let us therefore deduce from our understanding of 'The Writing Situation' a guide to the broadly basic elements that will be present in every piece of writing.

(1) Writing Needs a SELF-EXPRESSIVE Element. It needs something of the 'voice' of the writer, a distinctive though not obtrusive element of self-expression, direct and lively; emotion as well as thought; at least a degree of 'informality', which might at times become, in the best sense, colloquial[1], thereby staying in touch with the spoken 'living language'. In the letter-writing even of bureaucrats, for example, such 'self-expression' is the last of the 'three elements' advocated by Sir Ernest Gowers: 'be short, be simple, be human' (*The Complete Plain Words*, Penguin 1968, p. 45).

(2) Writing Needs a CRAFT Element. To be *writing* and not just spontaneously written down speech, it needs to be considered, drafted and worked over—a multi-stage process—with an eye not only to the surface conventions of written language but also to conciseness and connectedness, genre and form.

(3) Writing Needs an IDEAS Element. Ideas are cheap, as social chatter reminds us. But writing needs ideas in a context very different from that of most speech: it needs ideas for a readership with limited time for reading. So the context of writing exerts an onerous pressure or discipline for devising, choosing and relating only the most strictly relevant ideas. To this extent it needs a deeper kind of thinking than talking usually needs.

(4) Writing Needs a READER Element. The writer, in solitary concentration on the task, can become so engrossed with the ideas or the medium as to forget the interests of the intended reader(s). This is why so many authorities from Aristotle onward have stressed that writers need a vitalising element of 'reader awareness', if not in the drafting stage when the assembling of ideas is so demanding, then

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[1] An old but persistent meaning of 'colloquial' is 'vulgar speech', illiterate and slangy. But that meaning is giving way to a better informed one: 'Characteristic of or appropriate to the spoken language or to writing that seeks its effect; informal in diction or style of expression' (*American Heritage Dictionary*). The distinguished early 19th century prose writer William Hazlitt was advocating some such use of colloquial when he said: 'I plead guilty to the determined use of acknowledged idioms and common elliptical expressions.'

certainly in the revision of the draft and its final preparation for 'publication'.

All of these basic elements will be found in all good writing from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* to six-year-old Klara's

Tom is my cats nam he laks milk

Klara is using *self-expressive* language; there is evidence of *craft* in her lettering, spelling and punctuation (capital, period); two *ideas* have been selected and conveyed; and she has written for classroom *readers.*

Of these four basic elements, only the 'self-expressive' is likely to be challenged. 'What about formal writing?' someone is bound to ask. 'Surely its spirit is the opposite of self-expressive?' The question gets to the heart of the style problem, but there is only room here to raise counter-questions: Can *any* writing be called good which lacks the directness and liveliness of the 'self-expressive'? Is 'formal' ever anything but a euphemism which tries to excuse unnecessary dullness and heaviness? Where is the example of 'formal writing' that would not benefit from a rewriting which injects expressive elements in the interests of communicating better with the readers?

As a student complained: 'When I write a paper I make it personal. I put myself into it and I write well. It bothers me when people tell me to make it more impersonal--to take *me* out of it. I'm afraid I can't write unless I am in the paper somehow.'[2]

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[2] Jody S., *cit.* Toby Fulwiler, *English Journal* (N.C.T.E.), December 1980, p. 14.

Varied Views of Good Writing

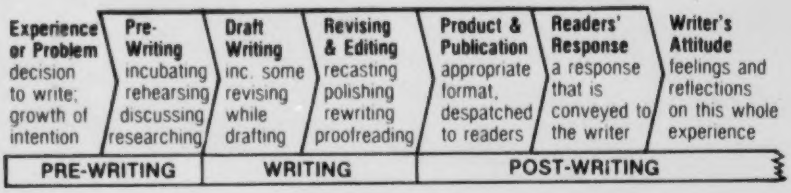
- 'Discourse ought always to be obvious . . . We must study, not only that every hearer may understand us, but that it shall be impossible for him not to understand us.'—*Quintilian*, Roman Writer c. A.D. 35-96.
- 'One prose style is better than another when it communicates the same meanings as the other does but requires less effort from the reader.'—*E.D. Hirsch, Jr.*
- 'I try to give little trouble to the readers. I avoid words that send them to the dictionary, and metaphors that are not common metaphors.' —*Jorge Luis Borges.*
- 'Prose writing . . . I don't think should be anything but accurate.'— *John O'Hara.*
- 'Good prose is like a windowpane.'—*George Orwell.*
- 'Connectedness is the essence of writing, as interchange is the essence of speech.'—*G.W. Turner.*
- 'My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is above all, to make you *see.* That—and no more, and it is everything.'—*Joseph Conrad..*
- 'Carefully examined, a good—an interesting—style will be found to consist in a constant succession of tiny observable surprises.'—*Ford Madox Ford.*
- 'Everything written is as good as it is dramatic!'—*Robert Frost.*
- 'There is no such thing as good writing; there is only good rewriting.'—*Anon.*

The Qualities of Good Writing

[The following statement by Donald M. Murray, novelist, author of *A Writer Teaches Writing*, and teacher of writing at the University of New Hampshire, is reprinted with his permission and that of *English Journal*, National Council of Teachers of English of U.S.A. It appeared in the issue of March, 1979.]

1. *Meaning*
   There must be content in an effective piece of writing. It must add up to something. This is the most important element in good writing, but although it must be listed first it is often discovered last through the process of writing.
2. *Authority*
   Good writing is filled with specific, accurate, honest information. The reader is persuaded through authoritative information that the writer knows the subject.
3. *Voice*
   Good writing is marked by an individual voice. The writer's voice may be the most significant element in distinguishing memorable writing from good writing.
4. *Development*
   The writer satisfies the reader's hunger for information. The beginning writer almost always overestimates the reader's hunger for language and underestimates the reader's hunger for information.
5. *Design*
   A good piece of writing is elegant in the mathematical sense. It has form, structure, order, focus, coherence. It gives the reader a sense of completeness.
6. *Clarity*
   Good writing is marked by a simplicity which is appropriate to the subject. The writer has searched for and found the right word, the effective verb, the clarifying phrase. The writer has removed the writer so that the reader sees through the writer's style to the subject, which is clarified and simplified.

It is my belief that these qualities are the same for poetry and fiction as well as non-fiction.


Experience or Problem
decision to write; growth of intention
Pre-Writing
incubating rehearsing discussing researching
Draft Writing
inc. some revising while drafting
Revising & Editing
recasting polishing rewriting proofreading
Product & Publication
appropriate format, despatched to readers
Readers' Response
a response that is conveyed to the writer
Writer's Attitude
feelings and reflections on this whole experience
PRE-WRITING
WRITING
POST-WRITING

'Process' — the General Idea

'Process', applied to writing, is a term, a concept, and a general idea about how writing happens. It is not, as is sometimes supposed, a method for teaching writing in cut-and-dried stages. But it provides teacher and child with invaluable pointers on how to go about each piece of writing and how to change direction when things are going wrong.

Moreover an understanding of 'process' brings a notable bonus to any classroom: it provides the young writers with a language for thinking and talking critically about what they are doing while composing. Look, for instance, at the terms provided by the process diagram above; they enable the teacher to surround children with ongoing discussion of the writing craft.

The diagram, however, presents the terms in a formal-looking way. The teacher can avoid giving the children a stuffy impression by sometimes discussing 'process' in plainer terms, for example:

> The writing 'process' is the whole series of thoughts and actions that at last produce a polished piece of writing. It starts when you decide to write about something important that has happened to you. You will usually think and feel about it a lot and may also talk and read about it; then, after a time, you will get a flash about what to say and will start writing. Your first draft will perhaps be a start-stop business which includes some revising as you go. When it's finished you will need to read it back (next day if possible) and will probably find that you must revise some more. Finally you'll do a complete rewriting, including still more polishing. At last you will have something clear and interesting.

This is an outline of what might be termed a 'full process' or 'extended process'.

In any school week, a child's writing will cover many forms, most of which will be less than 'full' or 'extended'. The extent of the process underlying each piece of writing will depend on its specific 'writing situation'. For example:

- *One 'situation'* (or 'context') — say, a letter to a local newspaper — calls for meticulous pre-writing preparation, then drafting, revising, polishing, and finally perhaps arranging for typing and posting.
- *A second 'situation'* — say, a description of the playground at lunchtime — calls for a draft which may on this occasion only be revised on the page before being filed for possible further revision if a need arises.

- *A third 'situation'* — say, field observations made during a science mini-excursion to the neighbouring park — calls only for notes which may be left in the notebook exactly as they are, to be used in a later discussion (though on another occasion such notes might be written up and 'published').

The point is that all of these are examples of 'process' — and so is *every* piece of writing a more or less extensive instance of process.

Why then do we say that the recent idea of 'process' has brought to teaching the most illuminating insights we have ever had about how-writing-happens? Because it brings an awareness of the feel-think-write-revise struggle that underlies real writing: that no one gets writing into 'publishable' form at the first attempt. Teachers realise that the one-shot draft of the old order of composition writing was absurd. Effective writing needs pre-writing preparation followed by a sequence of composing behaviours which, through interactive 'rehearsing, drafting, revising' (Donald M. Murray's summary), at last achieve meaning clearly, concisely, correctly and in a manner persuasive to a specific audience.

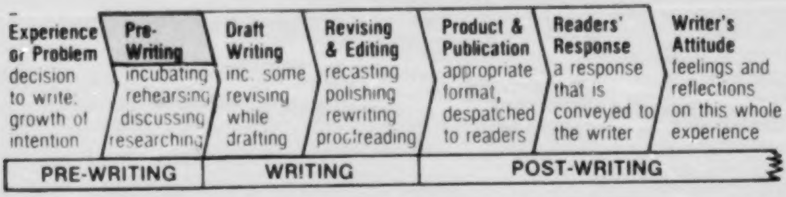
In the following pages, 'process' is discussed in some detail under convenient headings — convenient for diagramming and discussing. But they are not to be taken as 'stages' through which writing neatly moves, nor as 'steps' in a method of teaching writing:

- real writing does not happen as a mechanical series of stages;
- many of a child's pieces of writing, week by week, will not pass through a 'full' or 'extended' process.

However, once these qualifications have been made, the central fact about learning and teaching writing is this: *regular experience of the 'full' process of writing is important for every child.*

To teach writing effectively in the 1980s involves at least (1) being sensitively aware of the *nature* of the writing process in order to be able to help children at any point, (2) providing the children with a great *variety* of 'writing situations', including regular opportunities to experience the 'full' process in conditions of original authoring.

Variety, indeed, is an appropriate word on which to conclude this 'general idea' of the nature of the writing process. After all, there are only *varieties of process,* each being an individual and unique instance (arising from the infinite variety of writing situations) of *how writing happens in real conditions,* conditions which are very different from those of imposed and relatively mechanical exercises.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Pre-writing

'What we do before children write is probably more important than what we do after they write.'[1]

This statement represents a revolutionary change of attitude to school writing, a change brought about by the new understanding of 'process'. It is from the keynote address to a 1975 United States conference on the writing process. Prior to this, little was done *before* children wrote. They were commonly told,

> Here is your composition topic. Let's discuss it for five minutes . . . Now, spend a few minutes planning and then start writing [for so many minutes]. I'll collect the work for marking. See that you take more care this time with spelling, punctuation, sentences and paragraphs.

'Process' research makes it clear that no writer performs well at such abrupt notice and children should certainly not be expected to do so. Schools which believe in the importance of writing need to allocate adequate *time* to writing, and this must include an appropriate period of pre-writing preparation.

Significantly enough, the now extensive research into 'process' may be taken to have been launched only ten years before that conference by a pioneer paper on 'pre-writing'. Titled 'Pre-Writing: The Stage of Discovery in the Writing Process',[2] by D. Gordon Rohman, it said:

> Writing is usefully described as a process, something which shows continuous change in time like growth in organic nature. Different things happen at different stages in the process of putting thoughts into words and words onto paper . . . We divided the process at the point where the 'writing idea' is ready for the words and the page: everything before that we called 'Pre-Writing', everything after, 'Writing' and 'Re-Writing' . . . What sort of 'thinking' precedes writing? By 'thinking', we refer to that activity of mind which *brings forth* and develops ideas, plans, designs . . . essentially the imposition of pattern upon experience.'

Later research has mostly built on this view of 'process' though it sees writing to be more complex than Rohman's neatly three-staged process and also sees that 'discovery' need not be limited to the pre-writing stage but can go on throughout later drafting and revising.[3]

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[1] James R. Squire, in *The Writing Processes of Students*, Report of the Annual Conference on Language Arts, State University of N.Y. at Buffalo, 1975, ed. Walter T. Petty and Patrick J. Finn, p.6.

[2] Published in *College Composition and Communication* (N.C.T.E.), May 1965, pp. 106-112.

[3] See especially Donald M. Murray's 'Writing as Process: How Writing Finds Its Own Meaning', in *Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition*, ed. Timothy R. Donovan and Ben W. McClelland (N.C.T.E., 1980).

'Pre-writing' is usually taken to begin with a decision to write; that is, a writer begins from that moment to think about *what* to write and *how* to start. But in practice this decision might follow a long period of indecision which is integral to the process: 'Perhaps I should write' . . . 'I'm not sure this will make a good subject' . . . 'I don't know enough' . . . 'I won't be able to write well enough'. Teachers need to be aware that such doubts are common. Seen positively, they are the writing process already moving. But the child may need to be helped from these doldrums — helped by discussion with the teacher to move from broad concern with a *subject area* to the expression in a sentence of *an intended topic,* and then to carefully *limiting the topic* after considering what the readers are likely to expect.

With the topic at least tentatively deviced — given a 'working title' which may be improved later — the child moves into the area of more specific 'invention', of deciding broadly on an approach and getting an inkling of what to say. On page 62, under 'Topics for Writing', various 'invention procedures' are discussed. Children often need the help that these offer. After all, even professional writers suffer pre-writing agonies. Prolific Agatha Christie is an example: 'Contrary to popular belief, writing was never easy for this writer of 68 books. She fretted for weeks before getting into a novel and required constant expressions of reassurance . . .'[4]

What the teacher can nurture in the pre-writing period is a great effort of original thinking by the child, the dimensions of which must never be underestimated. Rohman calls this thinking 'the imposition of pattern upon experience' — in other words, a shaping in the mind of a version of what-has-happened-to-me, real or imagined. Other observers view what-happens-to-us as a diffuse scatter of stimuli/perceptions/reactions/ideas which can only be converted into meaningful 'experience' by an effort of selection and arrangement as our creative intelligence plays upon it: 'Experience,' said Aldous Huxley, 'isn't what happens to us; it is what we *do* with what happens to us.'

What a child *does* in this spirit as part of the process of getting ready to write may be infinitely various. Let us glance, however, at four behaviours which are commonly present when the child moves towards writing about 'experiences', whether the out-of-school or in-school kind, personal or curricular, drawn from the distant past or from just a moment ago.

(1) Thinking. In Rohman's words, the thinking that precedes writing is 'that activity of mind which *brings forth* and develops ideas, plans, designs.' Writers must have time to think. Even more importantly at this early stage, they need *time for thoughts to come.* Many of a writer's best thoughts come at odd moments. (A. E. Housman's best lines often came while shaving!) Major pieces of writing should therefore be projected well ahead of deadline (if any) so that thoughts can accumulate.

When a classroom becomes a purposeful 'writing community' which writes regularly, children get many of their 'mental flashes' outside school (on the way home, watching TV, before falling asleep, etc.). These creative moments become a continual subject of discussion. The children learn that 'worrying a problem' is really 'putting in an order' for a creative flash. Thus they take a big step forward in ability to think originally.

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[4] *Time,* 28/11/1977.

Few adults and fewer children can close their eyes and reflect on a problem for even half a minute without fantasy intruding and disrupting the train of thought. The American curriculum authority James Moffett[5] has urged the harnessing of modern meditation techniques to the thinking that takes place in the pre-writing period. This would cut down the amount of later revising, he argues. Recent brain research appears to support this view. When we write (or talk) we chiefly operate out of the brain's left hemisphere, which is good at detailed, linear, analytical thinking; but balanced thinking needs to include awareness of mental pictures and broad (w)holistic patterns which are 'seen' by the right hemisphere, operating best in eyes-closed, meditative, relatively non-languaging reflection. It is this second kind of thinking that is especially valuable to the writer casting about for a way to get started. It is increasingly being termed 'rehearsal' or 'mental rehearsal'.

(2) Talking. Talk is the natural recourse of anybody who has a problem. In classrooms where a flow of work-talk is normal, most children will talk in the pre-writing period to grasp the dimensions of a problem, to gain some insights about it and to connect some ideas.

But the contribution that talk can make to written composition has often been overstated and at times wildly exaggerated. ('Writing should be floated on a sea of talk.') This has led some teachers to think that children's writing improves in proportion to the quantity of talk that precedes it. They are usually disappointed. Patrick Groff, who has reviewed much of the relevant literature, declares: 'The idea that oral language activities in general will have a significant effect on children's written language has not been demonstrated.'[6]

The relation of talk to writing is not simple. It varies from one writing situation to another and from child to child. Sometimes talk is essential for creating a favourable set towards writing; more often it is desirable but not essential. Children who want to get on with writing should not be compelled to talk at length first. Occasionally talk even disperses energy for writing, becoming counter-productive. It all depends!

(3) Reading. Every 'writing classroom' should simultaneously be a 'reading classroom'. The literature the children are continually reading from the class and school libraries will enter into their thinking as they prepare for 'experience' writing. They will also refer to this literature for models which guide them in shaping their stories, poems and other literary forms. When they are writing in the informational curriculum areas, they will be encouraged to look up books and make notes.

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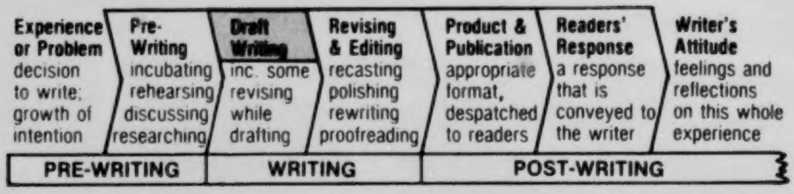
[5] 'Writing, Inner Speech and Meditation', in *Coming on Centre* (forthcoming; to be published by Hayden Book Co., 1981).

[6] 'The Effects of Talking on Writing', in *English in Education* (N.A.T.E.) Autumn 1979, p.36.

(4) Note-making. All primary schools cultivate some note-making from reference books, and this is an obvious activity in preparation for the writing of informational articles in areas such as social studies or science. Much less in evidence is the advice to children to note down thoughts of their own ('flashes', 'inspirations') which occur in the pre-writing period, often at random times.

Note-making is a good point at which to leave this discussion of 'pre-writing', for the pen is now in the hand and the child *is* writing, though not yet attempting the first draft. But in life a neat separation of 'stages' is seldom possible. The writing process tends to be continuous. The child who is 'making notes' may find that the latest note is in fact a good 'lead' that gets the writing of the draft under way — 'pre-writing' has flowed into 'draft writing'.



Experience or Problem
decision to write; growth of intention
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incubating rehearsing discussing researching
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inc. some revising while drafting
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recasting polishing rewriting proofreading
Product & Publication
appropriate format, despatched to readers
Readers' Response
a response that is conveyed to the writer
Writer's Attitude
feelings and reflections on this whole experience
PRE-WRITING
WRITING
POST-WRITING

Drafting

The ideal draft is written straight through at a single sitting without any crossings-out. Executed with a knowledge and confidence born of perfectly adequate preparation, it achieves a prose that is concise, lively, persuasive . . . But alas this seldom happens, and then only in short, inspired pieces.

Even when the preparation has been extensive there is a big obstacle at the outset: 'Beginnings are terrifying,' says a writer as experienced as Donald M. Murray. 'You have to capture the reader instantly.'[1] And Laura Huxley says of her novelist husband Aldous: 'He always has trouble at the beginning. He breaks off, starts again, changes — dropping the idea that seemed so good a few weeks ago.'[2] How much more difficult are beginnings for children, who write at shorter notice than novelists!

What can we do to help them begin? As with all craft questions, there can be no answer that does not respect individual differences. Allow everyone as much time as possible, certainly. Beyond that, in any one piece of writing, some children will want to start writing at once; some will fret, chat, doodle and otherwise stall for inspiration; some will try out 'leads' in the hope of hitting on one that will launch them; some will 'brainstorm', jotting down anything that comes to mind in whatever order; and some will methodically work out a plan. In a good 'writing classroom' all these will be regarded as legitimate options which are constantly being tried, compared and criticised. This is vastly superior to an all-or-none procedure such as, 'Make a plan before you start writing.' Abundant evidence shows that compulsory planning can be counter-productive for some children in many writing situations.

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[1] Donald M. Murray, in *Children Want to Write — Donald Graves in Australia*, (P.E.T.A., 1981), p. 109.

[2] Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley* (Knopf, 1973), p. 422.

As well as differences in getting started, there will be widely differing styles of moving through the draft. The range of styles can be indicated by a continuum which stretches between 'splurgers' at one end and 'agonisers' at the other. The first are the writers who 'hit the page' confidently and keep going until the end; the second start, have doubts, try other beginnings, then edge forward with continual crossings-out and recastings. Every writer can roughly locate himself or herself somewhere along this line, while expecting to vary somewhat from one piece of writing to another:

splurgers *agonisers*

A survey of (academic) writers at University College London in 1976 reported as its 'major finding':

> Those who planned their writing in detail ahead of time generally disliked the process; those who could think only as they wrote, enjoyed it most. And the latter enjoyed it in large measure because they recognised its role, not just in clarifying ideas, but also in originating them. Those who enjoy writing seem to be implicitly aware that the creative process demands a degree of uncertainty . . .[3]

It seems justified to infer from this and other evidence that 'splurgers' are a happier breed of writer — which is an insight of importance for teachers. We can gently encourage our 'agonisers' to experiment at times with drafting quickly, stopping as little as possible to make revisions, in the knowledge that there is plenty of opportunity to revise at the end.

Indeed, this advice fascinates young writers once they have become aware that nearly all first-draft writing needs some revision. They perceive that their present drafting style is not immutable, that experiment and practice can lead to improved fluency.

Given this awareness, they are well launched into a self-exploratory interest in the nature of written composing. *What is happening as I write?* Answers are accumulating in a body of research literature that is already formidably large and growing rapidly. There is only room here to present some illuminating insights which may help the teacher who wishes to start children introspecting and discussing.

Every teacher knows the restlessness, chatter and resistance of a class that is about to write. By degrees a settling takes place; and then absorption. If a bell interrupts before the end, the previously reluctant writers show a pained reluctance to 'come out of it', to stop writing and return to ordinary consciousness. Where have these writers been?

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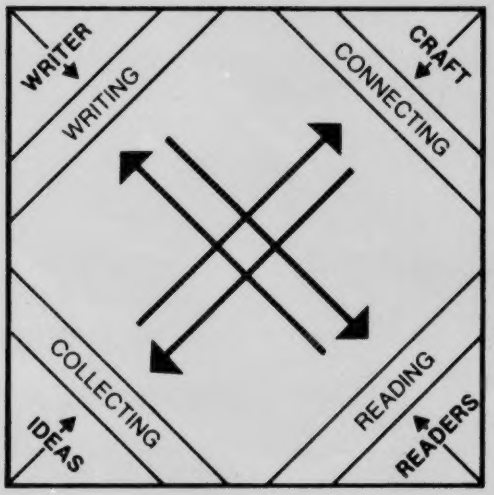
[3] David Lowenthal and Peter C. Wason, 'Academics and their Writing', *Times Literary Supplement*, 24/6/1977.

Writers, artists, creative workers in general, do not know where their best ideas come from. Creative or 'original' ideas are very different from memorised facts, which are simply regurgitated. Original expression is a putting together of impressions and ideas that have not come together before. Every child is capable of this kind of originality because creativity is a universal human propensity. Writing offers it significant scope. One of the great virtues of writing, among all the human arts, is that it is available daily to every child, it is regarded as a 'basic' by society, and it is capable of expressing profound depths of creativity.

Barrett J. Mandel has discussed the source of original composing under the title, 'The Writer Writing Is Not at Home' — that is, the writer, in the depths of composition, has left the 'home' of his or her everyday ego-consciousness for the 'still centre of creativity' where he or she inwardly 'listens' and receives ideas. The short story writer Katherine Mansfield said somewhere that she wrote best on mornings when she found herself in her 'calm centre'. Mandel urges teachers to *attach even more importance to this part of the writing process than to the act of revising,* which is usually more mechanical. 'We must push students past their own ego-restrictions so that they will be open to the experience of having their words flow from wherever their source is . . . it is non-conscious, non-logical, unsegmented, non-problematic and perfectly dependable'.[4]

Donald M. Murray, from another position, sees the writer (whether drafting or revising) trying to integrate 'four primary forces' — *collecting* and *connecting, writing* and *reading.* 'As we collect a piece of



N.B. Writing is made through a complex of interactions, many of them instantaneous.

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[4] Barrett J. Mandel, in *College Composition and Communication,* December 1980, p. 375.

information, we immediately try to connect it with other pieces of information; when we write a phrase, we read it to see how it fits with what has gone before and how it may lead to what comes after.'[5] This we can represent, in the diagram above, as falling within the framework of our earlier diagram of the 'writing situation'.

The continual complex interaction of the 'four primary forces' shows that the sensory, mental and physical operations underlying writing do not take place in a simple, forward-moving way. Murray is impressed with the views of Sondra Perl who stresses that the writing process includes a strong element of 'retrospective structuring': 'movement forward occurs only after one has reached back, which in turn occurs only after one has some sense of where one wants to go'.[6]

The recursive element in writing is especially intriguing to young writers: we continually *read back* while writing, and then wait for the creative source to 'tell' us what to say next. To write is to do a great deal of incidental reading. *'We writeread* or *readwrite,'* says Murray. Children can be asked to observe this and their discoveries excite them: 'I seem to be reading back a few words or a sentence most of the time I'm writing' . . . 'I lost the thread and had to read back two paragraphs' . . . 'When I'd written nearly a page I had to go back to the beginning and find out how I *felt* when I started.'

All modern 'process' research confirms that the act of first-draft writing should be carried out in conditions of great freedom:

.. freedom to go about it in one's own way
.. freedom to be carried in an unintended direction
.. freedom to stop, discard, and start all over again
.. freedom to enjoy production of original expression
.. freedom to enjoy communion with the creative 'still centre'
.. freedom to 'splurge' in the hope of improving fluency
.. freedom to concentrate on ideas without having to be concerned with handwriting, neatness, spelling, punctuation, grammar or any other 'correctness' factor.

To propose such freedom does not mean a sanctioning of sloppy writing. This is an early stage of the writing process and there will be time later for discipline, editing, proofreading. Writers young or old need to give undivided attention at this early stage to the discovery of ideas. Of course, discovery need not be limited to the drafting stage, but that is commonly the time in school conditions for the birth of essential ideas and structure.

At present some teachers consider that one draft followed by a little editing and rewriting is as much as the timetable and children's interest will allow; where this is the attitude, free origination is vital during drafting, and the follow-up will be limited to a disciplined tidying and correcting. We shall see in the next section that a more enlightened attitude to revision is possible. But whether a little revision is carried out or a lot, the case for freedom in draft writing remains unassailable.

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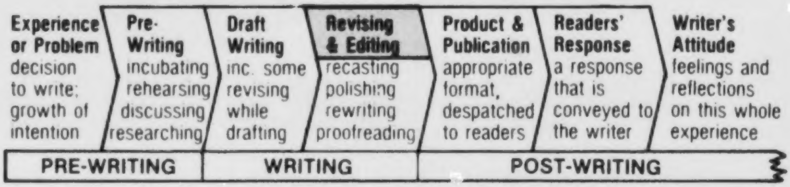
[5] Donald M. Murray, 'Writing as Process: How Writing Finds Its Own Meaning,' in *Eight Approaches to Composition Teaching*, ed. Timothy R. Donovan and Ben W. McClelland (N.C.T.E., 1980), pp. 7-12.

[6] Sondra Perl, *cit.* Donald M. Murray, *ibid.*, p. 7.


Experience or Problem
decision to write; growth of intention
Pre-Writing
incubating rehearsing discussing researching
Draft Writing
inc. some revising while drafting
Revising & Editing
recasting polishing rewriting proofreading
Product & Publication
appropriate format, despatched to readers
Readers' Response
a response that is conveyed to the writer
Writer's Attitude
feelings and reflections on this whole experience
PRE-WRITING
WRITING
POST-WRITING

Revising

'Rewriting is the whole secret to writing.'[1]

That is the opinion of no less a writer than Mario Puzo, author of the best-selling *Godfather*. And Welsh novelist John Gardner says of revising: 'It's my favourite part. I rewrite all the time, that's my main technique . . . I may do 30 readings on a single draft, changing it. But I'm absolutely convinced that the whole art of fiction is rewrites.'[2]

Not only of fiction. Revising is the main technique of every writer who wishes to write well. If this seems to be an exaggerated statement, it is only so because the traditional, school approach to writing (determined largely by exam pressure) has been that of 'one-shot drafting'. That is, the children were expected to produce a final product at first writing. This made quality writing unattainable and produced generation after generation which, with the exception of an able minority, said, 'I can't write, I hate writing.'

Now our understanding of the writing process enables us to say, 'Every child can write!' — provided we teachers don't leave them stuck with the belief that their first drafts are all they are capable of. We have to show them that everyone's first draft is by its nature rather unsatisfactory, and perhaps even rough and messy. We have to explain again and again the truth of Donald Graves' statement that

> Writing only truly becomes writing in revision. A professional's first draft is often not much better than anyone else's. It is chiefly in revision that the professional's experience and craftsmanship show.[3]

His research has established that children, given gentle encouragement, can begin to revise from age five or six, and that when they thus begin early they accept revision as perfectly natural and necessary.

With time and opportunity to revise in a 'writing classroom' which expects it, children learn to revise by revising, as an aspect of 'learning to write by writing'. There are also many tips or hints the teacher can give them, and we shall discuss some of these below. On the other hand, classes that are new to the idea of revising need the utmost help from their teachers throughout a lengthy transition period from their past habitual one-shot drafting to full acceptance of revision as an integral part of the writing process.

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[1] *Time*, 28/8/1978.

[2] *Christian Science Monitor*, 7/7/1980.

[3] *Donald Graves in Australia — 'Children Want to Write'*, ed. R. D. Walshe (P.E.T.A., 1981), p.13. Testimonies from professionals about their usually extensive revision practices are not hard to find. Two readily available sources: *Writers at Work*, ed. Kay Dick (Penguin Books, 1972); *Speaking of Writing*, ed. R. D. Walshe (Reed, 1975).

What is Revision?

'Revision' is the generic term for many behaviours that enter into the writing process. Since there is no simple agreement on the meaning of a variety of terms for these behaviours, the proper course is to define one's use of some of them at the outset.

- *Revising* (re-vision) is seeing-it-again, a second, critical look — or third, or umpteenth. Donald Graves says that the development order in which young children learn to revise is: (1) add, (2) cut, (3) reorder.[4] In a little more detail, revision can be explained and dramatised for older children in this way:

> You *add* words to fill out meaning ('expansion'),
> You *change* words to achieve exact description ('specifics'),
> You *delete* words to tighten your sentences ('economy'),
> You *sharpen* punctuation to make reading easier ('readability'),
> You *rearrange* words, sentences or paragraphs to produce a more
> convincing order or sequence of explanation ('logic'),
> You *correct* any slips or omissions ('proofreading').

- *Rehearsing,* a term first advanced by Donald Graves, is what the writer does in the mind (or on paper) *while preparing to write.* It is especially 'rehearsing in the head' and it can be extensive for anyone capable of disciplined meditation, as very few children are. But it cannot be restricted to the pre-writing period. Any 'looking ahead', in the mind, can be considered to be rehearsing and this may occur during drafting and certainly during the revising of a draft in order to discover what might be worked into the next draft.
- *In-process revising* is the altering a writer does during drafting.
- *Self-editing* is the altering done after the draft is completed. (In practice it may well be termed simply 'editing'.) Now, distanced somewhat from the draft, the writer sees it more objectively, can afford to think critically about details, can think about its effect on the intended readers, and so on.
- *Editing,* in commercial publishing practice, is what a specialist editor does to a writer's manuscript (MS) to make it ready for typesetting. It may result in changes to content as well as structure and mechanics; but publishers try to avoid the expense involved in making major revisions of content or structure. They send back a clumsy MS for further revision (self-editing) by the author. When this has been done, the MS goes to a 'copy editor', whose job is limited to checking surface correctness and smoothness and to 'styling', which secures conformity with the standards and conventions observed by the particular publisher *(e.g. program* or *programme,* double or single inverted commas, indented or full-out paragraphs, method of footnoting). In school practice, 'editing' — when the term does not extend to 'self-editing' — is the revision carried out on any aspect of a

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[4] *Ibid.*, 116.

child's writing by peers, older children, parent aides or the teacher, if possible with the child observing.

- *Rewriting* is the term usually reserved for the final writing — the form in which it is presented to the intended readers (or to a typist or typesetter). But rewriting may also be carried out on a much-revised draft so that it can be seen clearly and then subjected to further revision.
- *Proofreading* is simply the final checking of the rewritten draft before presenting it to the readers. (Or the typist. When it comes back from the typist it must be proofread again.)

The Necessity of Revision

The one-shot draft[5], except in rare and brief instances, is only half-shaped thought. It has emerged too recently from the mind's rambling stream-of-consciousness to rate as *writing*, a language form which differs from inner-speech and conversational speech in significant ways (see p. 161). *Revision is what turns a draft into writing;* it is as much a 'basic' of writing as punctuation or proper syntax.

In collecting first drafts for marking as finished writing under the old 'composition' order, teachers not only condemned themselves to mainly dull reading and heavy correction, but they limited the children to what many writers regard as the most irksome part of the writing process. Writing usually gets easier and more interesting once we have the first draft in front of us. The hard work finished, we can revise to achieve clarity, interest, liveliness.

This point is especially significant for children. What they achieve in the first draft often looks dull to them when they read it back. At this stage more than any other we must save them from feeling, 'I can't write, I hate writing'. Donald Graves has diagnosed this moment of crisis.[6]

> A child has had a vivid experience and wants to write about it. First recollections — let's call them a first 'rehearsal' — are richly impressionistic, of people, conflict, sights, sounds, feelings, words. A later rehearsal achieves some sequencing of what happened, though not yet many full or connected sentences. Then a third tries to pin down sentences so that writing can begin. At last, a first draft is roughed onto paper . . . But reading it back, the young writer finds that these sentences, hewn with so much effort, look plodding and dull. What has happened to the teeming richness of the experience? . . . 'I have caught so little of it — I'm a failure at writing!'

So what can a teacher do? Explain that no one gets it right the first time. Not even Patrick White or Colleen McCullough or Mario Puzo. But look at the positive side of what has happened: 'You have really done some surprisingly useful thinking, to cut all those impressions down until you've discovered some essentials. True, they are *bare* essentials, but now in revision you can start to build on that bareness — build something lively that will capture your readers. Your first draft was all reduction; now revision can be all development, and then you'll know that of course you can write.'

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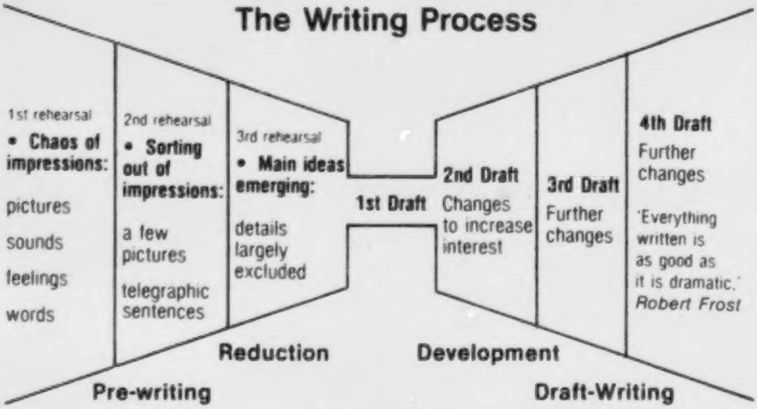
[5] Only in the upper secondary school does one-shot-draft essay writing have a purpose — in the hurried writing demanded by external exams. But this only needs practice for a few weeks prior to such exams. And those children will manage it best who have already become willing, fluent writers as a result of a happy history of plentiful writing, interspersed with polished writing, throughout all the primary and secondary years.

[6] The following account and diagram is my version of a talk with Donald Graves. For a more extensive version, see *Donald Graves in Australia*, p. 7. — R.D.W.


The Writing Process
1st rehearsal
• Chaos of impressions:
pictures
sounds
feelings
words
2nd rehearsal
• Sorting out of impressions:
a few pictures
telegraphic sentences
3rd rehearsal
• Main ideas emerging:
details largely excluded
1st Draft
2nd Draft
Changes to increase interest
3rd Draft
Further changes
4th Draft
Further changes
'Everything written is as good as it is dramatic.'
Robert Frost
Reduction
Development
Pre-writing
Draft-Writing

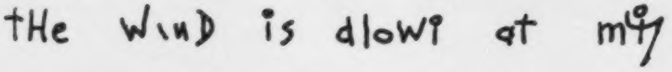
Writing, like the potter's clay, only becomes a thing of usefulness or beauty through repeated smoothing and shaping. Even professional writers are seldom brilliant in their first drafts; it is the work and experience they pour into revision that enables them to achieve quality. Hemingway, for instance, had to rewrite the ending of his novel *A Farewell to Arms* 39 times before he considered it right; and here is the testimony of Cardinal Newman, one of the greatest prose writers of the nineteenth century:

> I write, I write again: I write a third time in the course of six months. Then I take the third: I literally fill the page with corrections, so that another person could not read it. I then write it out fair for the printer. I put it by; I take it up; I begin to correct again: it will not do. Alterations multiply, pages are rewritten, little lines sneak and crawl about. The whole page is disfigured; I write again; I cannot count how many times this process is repeated.

Introducing a Class to Revision — or 'Editing'

The term 'editing' as a general synonym for 'revision' is the one that is catching on in the schools, probably because it has a touch of the dramatic for the young. Obviously there is more to revision/editing than polishing the surface features of a piece of writing but children new to the idea of revising will not at first understand this. They will be able to attempt little more than proofreading. So they will have to be helped to see that *revision is an unlimited striving to improve both the surface and the depths of a draft.*

Young Helen, just turned five, writes one letter over another in her original composition:


tHe WinD is dlowi at mi

The wind is blowing at me.

It is her first observed act of self-editing. Her teacher shows complete approval though the change is not yet correct. Helen is fortunate. Her class at Grays Point Public School expects revision as a normal and necessary activity. Some day, however, she will be surprised to learn that there are children who do nothing more than proofread their drafts before handing them in for marking — children who would feel put upon if asked to do more.

How does a teacher introduce children to the practice of editing when they have had years of nothing but single-draft writing? If editing is simply imposed on them, they will hate it. Understandably they will see it as a new tyranny rather worse than the old. What can be done?

In general, *don't impose editing.* Instead, try first to get them interested in writing itself, wait till they are writing fluent first drafts of many kinds (notes, letters, stories, articles, journals, etc.), and then gently introduce editing practices. The process will gather momentum as the children begin to realise that first draft writing can always be improved, that real writers write that way, and so on — the whole approach we have been discussing. In other parts of this book we have dealt with ways to achieve self-motivation: continually promoting writing, giving reasons for its importance, setting an example by sometimes writing with the class, offering avenues of 'publication', explaining that everything published needs to be edited, showing that editing is integral to the writing process, above all allowing and encouraging personal choice of writing topics — all this and more.

When the class is showing interest and there is a lift in the fluency of drafting, editing practices can begin almost imperceptibly:

.. spotlight spontaneous efforts at revision;
.. put short pieces on the board or overhead and collectively edit them;
.. show the value of reading aloud in order to detect flaws;
.. arrange 'writing partners' to secure critical peer-reading;
.. show you expect that anything handed in for marking and everything that is published will be carefully checked and rewritten.

After a period of such activities tell the class that their development in writing has made it possible for them to begin a new important stage of writing. Then launch in a dramatic way a new era of writing 'the way real writers write', not only the literary writers but journalists, secretaries, scientists, engineers and all manner of report writers. The class is on the way to becoming a 'writing community' but it will still need a great deal of help.

10 Ways to Help a Class Develop in Editing Ability

1. Self-editing tips. The novelist Ernest Hemingway said, 'You learn to write by applying the seat of the pants to the chair.' That's a nicely colloquial way of expressing the ancient Roman insight, 'By writing we learn to write'. The teacher should, however, be able to add some gentler and more specific advice. Here are a dozen homilies any of which might from time to time help a young writer with self-editing:

- 'You can do some revising as you draft, but I advise you to experiment occasionally with writing straight through your draft, and then revise it afterwards.'
- 'The more *rehearsing* a writer does in the mind, the less revising is needed on paper. Why not try some eyes-closed thinking or imagining before you start?'
- 'Think hard about your readers. Acquire the art of *reader awareness.* It's a great stimulus to brightening up your draft.'
- 'For careful revision, read your piece over several times — fast and slow, silently and aloud.'
- 'Put aside your draft till tomorrow. You will then see it more clearly. You may also find that your mind has continued to work on it — has thrown up new ideas.'
- 'Try reading your piece onto tape and then play it back. Listen for rhythm and for any jarring or falseness in your *writer's voice.'*
- 'Ask your writing partner or someone else to criticise your piece. Tell them you are not a temperamental writer — that only criticism is of any help to you.'
- *'Make it messy to make it clear!* — this is a great slogan because it suggests that a revised draft should be covered with words added, words crossed out, arrows switching sentences, and so on. Then it is ready for a careful rewriting.'
- 'Put your draft away and *speak* it from memory to your writing partner. Then get it out again and read it. You will see it with fresh eyes.'
- 'If you're dissatisfied, why not just throw that draft away and start a new one?'
- 'Perhaps you should start to rewrite your draft slowly and thoughtfully, looking well ahead, and keeping yourself open for new ideas.'
- If any of the above thoughts seem too sophisticated, why not fall back on the answer Hemingway made when asked what his problem was in revising a novel many times? 'Getting the words right', he said. That is an unbeatably simple way of explaining what revising/editing is all about.

2. Individual conference. Regular one-to-one 'conference' between child and teacher *during the process of writing* is by far the most significant single form of help in developing editing skills that a teacher can offer a child. The art of conferencing has been carried to a high level by Donald Graves and his research associates. (See the chapter, 'The Conference Approach', in this book, and detailed accounts in *Donald Graves in Australia,* ed. R.D. Walshe, P.E.T.A., 1981.) In the conference, the teacher is interested, supportive, keen to help the child value and use well what the child knows, and careful not to take 'ownership' of the writing away by giving too much direction or advice. Generalised responses are avoided; specific questions, observations and expressions of approval are preferred. Conferences usually last for only a few minutes, but good classroom management is nevertheless called for to achieve individualisation in a class of 30. Some typical comments and questions:[7]

.. 'That's a good opening sentence.'
.. 'I like your use of the word *muddle.*'
.. 'You've paragraphed well . . . one for each new idea.'
.. 'That was beaut. You've taught me a lot about frogs.'
.. 'Read that the way it's written. Isn't something missing?'
.. 'Do you need that sentence? Haven't you said that before?'
.. 'Read that again . . . M-m-m, just tell me a bit more.'
.. 'What word could have been used instead of *rain?*'
.. 'That's a long sentence. Read it again so I can hear where you pause.'

3. Open (or public) individual conference. Occasionally the teacher makes whole-class use of an interesting draft, after securing the child's agreement to take part in an open conference. If possible the draft, or part of it, is written up on a board or transparency, or it is duplicated for everyone. At first the teacher and writer converse, and the class looks on; then the class might help with comments on what they like and what might be developed. Some attention is always given to *how* this writing was produced — that is, the process behind the writing.

4. Writing partners. Everyone, child or adult, needs a writing partner, a caring, patient, helpfully critical person who will really look deeply at one's writing and come up with detailed comments. The teacher needs to promote this arrangement with enthusiasm — it can have powerful effects! In general, friendship pairing is satisfactory; but as the teacher gets to know the children, some changes may be diplomatically effected, for example, by having a stronger writer help a weaker for a time. A teacher who does some writing along with the children can sustain interest in 'partnering' by rostering the children to be his or her partner for one week each.

5. Group conference. In a class where groups are functioning successfully, a group can be asked to conference together on its members' writing, sometimes with and sometimes without the teacher. Or specific writing groups might be formed. They will conduct sessions in much the same way as the whole-class 'open individual conference' above. For example, teacher or group leader, speaking after Adrian has read his piece:

.. 'What does Adrian's report tell us about whales?'
.. 'How does this story make you feel?'
.. 'What do you think of his opening?'
.. 'Do you like, *The whales wallowed lazily in the water?*'
.. 'Notice how Adrian has started this sentence . . .'
.. 'How might he have changed the final sentence for stronger effect?'

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[7] I am indebted for most of the points here and in 5. to Trevor Cairney, Reading/Language Consultant, Waratah Advisory Services Centre, Waratah, N.S.W.

6. Class demonstration. The teacher asks the class to compose collectively a draft of a letter, story, or report, writing it up on the chalkboard or overhead projector. Everyone then writes an improved version. Next, the children use their work to suggest changes, again collectively, with the teacher writing them up, producing a 'draft revised on the page', replete with additions, cuts and rearrangements — an edited draft exemplifying the slogan, 'Make it messy to make it clear!' Finally, the class can write out a fair copy of either this piece or their own still further revised version.

7. Checklists and personal lists. Checklists may be useful for teachers, but do they ever look anything but boring to children? Especially when lengthy! Why not avoid teacher-originated lists altogether by asking the class or a group to brainstorm 'Points to Watch in Checking My Draft'. Then get agreement on eliminating obvious points, and thus fine the list to 6-8 points that really mean something to the children *at this stage*. Priorities might be seen as falling under three heads. (*mnemonic:* three Ss):

- *Statement:* Is the overall effect clear, interesting, lively?
  Will it communicate well to the intended readers?
- *Structure:* An introduction, body, conclusion?
  The best possible sequence of sentences and paragraphs?
- *Surface:* Words: aptness; economy; spelling?
  Sentences: punctuation; correctness?
  Paragraphs: indented; each a good grouping of sentences?

The best list is one compiled by each child — a cumulative list of newly acquired skills, under a title such as 'Things I Can Do'. It might be kept at the back of the Writing Folder or Notebook. Most obviously it will include the mechanical skills but can also record control over content and genres ('I wrote about space', 'I wrote a poem/joke/play/letter-to-the-editor').

8. 'Share sessions'. Try, every day, to read out to the whole class one or two pieces of draft or completed writing . . . This is the 'writing community' enjoying one another's productions and seriously discussing strong and weak points.

9. Teacher's written comments. The teacher's written comments can be slanted towards *help with editing* rather than *correction.* Not perhaps as effective as an individual conference, these comments can attempt the same purposes — to be constructive, specific, etc.

10. Once-a-term: 'The Editorial Department'. 'This class today becomes the Editorial Department of the well-known firm, Australasian Authors Pty Ltd. We publish books in Language, Literature (including Poetry), Drama, Mass Media, Social Studies, Science, Mathematics, Health and Fitness, Arts and Crafts, and Hobbies. For the whole of this week we will be editing and publishing books by our distinguished authors. As Editorial Director, I want to outline to you, the editorial staff, the publishing policy and editing standards set by this firm . . .'

In preparation for this week, everyone (as *author*) has produced several good pieces of writing (the *manuscripts* or MSS) which are now to be submitted to the firm for acceptance or rejection. Any unpublished writings produced during the term are eligible together with new pieces written specially for the event.

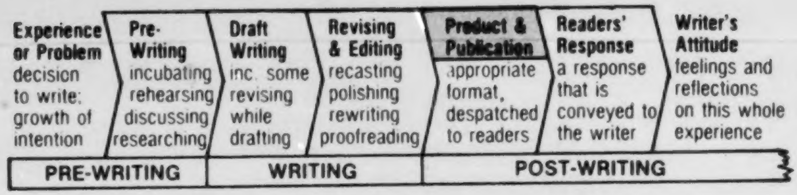
The Editorial Director in his or her opening address reminds the 'staff' that 'editing' means any or all operations that improve the readability or style of a book — improvements to subject matter, structure and surface correctness. The week can include staff discussions led by the Director at which MSS are collectively edited. Everyone prepares at least one of their MSS for publication whilst assisting and being assisted by other staff members. The week should achieve a more searching editorial scrutiny than at other times.

A part of the week will include revising what the staff should know about 'copy editing', that is, attending to surface correctness and smoothness, including a scrupulous final 'proofreading' of each finished MS. This should not become a wearisome comprehensive revision of *all* the mechanics and conventions of writing but can be confined to what the teacher knows are the current difficulties of many of the children (upper primary only). Here are some of the issues that may need attention . . .

Reminders about Surface Features of Good Writing

Consult the glossary, 'Tips for Writers', at the end of this book. It discusses many of the detailed problems of the 'surface' of writing, including . . .

- *Punctuation:*
  - apostrophe
  - brackets
  - colon
  - comma
  - dash
  - exclamation mark
  - full stop (period)
  - parenthetical devices
  - possessives
  - punctuation
  - question mark
  - quotation marks
  - semicolon
- *A Little Practical Grammar:*
  - agreement in number (verb with subject)
  - pronoun reference
  - pronoun usage (subject and object forms)
  - run-on sentences
  - tense consistency
  - verbless sentences ('fragments')
  - voice (active and passive)
- *Other Issues:*
  - ambiguity
  - connectives
  - redundancy
  - repetition of words
  - sentences
  - paragraphs
  - simpler words
  - words often confused


Experience or Problem
decision to write: growth of intention
Pre-Writing
incubating rehearsing discussing researching
Draft Writing
inc. some revising while drafting
Revising & Editing
recasting polishing rewriting proofreading
Product & Publication
appropriate format, despatched to readers
Readers' Response
a response that is conveyed to the writer
Writer's Attitude
feelings and reflections on this whole experience
PRE-WRITING
WRITING
POST-WRITING

Publishing

Q.: How important is the growth of in-school 'publication' which began to assume large proportions in the 1970s and continues to grow in the '80s?

A.: Vastly important. More important even than many of its most enthusiastic promoters conceive. They tend to see 'publication' narrowly as 'display to an audience.' But the essence of 'publication' is *finding readers*. The next big forward move in the teaching of writing requires us to show:

(1) the place of 'publication' and readers in the writing process;
(2) that writing for real readers will put an end to the traditional artificiality of school writing;
(3) that a new order in school writing is opening up;
(4) that whenever readers are sought they can be found;
(5) that many forms of 'publication' are available and a writer should choose the one most likely to attract intended readers.

(1) The place of 'publication' and readers in the writing process. The publishable 'product' of writing should not be counterposed to the 'process' which produced it. Yet some teachers, in their first enthusiasm for the relevance of 'process', are heard to proclaim, 'Writing is a process, not a product.' This is wrong. Writing is both process and product.

More exactly, the product is part of the process, the end part that has lent the earlier parts much of their *purpose*. Why do we write? Seldom only for self-expression or purely disinterested discovery — and even then we write in order to 'publish' the product to the self. More often we write to inform or persuade others, namely *readers*. The principal purpose underlying the writing process is to publish a finished product to readers — the purpose is not to produce writing, but to produce reading!

Obviously, then, writers need readers at the end of the writing process. This is why 'process' needs a 'post-writing' stage just as it needs a 'pre-writing' stage. The writing does not end for the writer with the last full-stop. There remain the arranging of the published format, the delivery to the reader(s), and above all the response of the reader(s). The essence of 'publication' is finding readers, and a writer is fortunate who finds responsive ones, able to be specifically helpful with detailed comments as well as being broadly encouraging.

But writers need those readers not only at the 'post-writing' stage but also at the 'pre-writing' stage. They need them as *intended readers* who, by looming ahead in the writer's thoughts, influence what is about to be written. Just as we only talk when there is a real person to talk to, and the relationship determines *what* we say and *how* we say it, so a writer similarly needs an intended reader or readers because this relationship helps the choice of *what* to write and *how* to present it. The trouble with most school writing in the past has been its vagueness; written for no one in particular, it could only be bland or dim or a mishmash.

Teachers who are implementing the message of the 'conference approach' (p. 121) — that writers should be encouraged to choose their own topics — are now beginning to perceive that writers should also be encouraged to choose their readers and choose the form of publication. To make such choices is self-motivating. The writers retain 'ownership' at all stages of the writing process. This is full authoring. It transforms the traditional school writing situation where the teacher prescribed the topic, the readership, and the form of publication.

So the teacher encourages every child to create his or her own 'context' or 'writing situation' by asking these pre-writing questions:

.. Why are you writing?
.. What is your topic? (or broad area, or working title)
.. Who are your intended readers?
.. What form might your writing take? (broad structure, genre)
.. How do you propose to reach your readers?

There will be nothing binding about the answers at this stage. They will be hypothetical, provisional, subject to change at any subsequent stage of the process — remember Donald Murray's caution, 'Writing rebels against intent!'

Mature writers set great store on developing the imaginative faculty called 'reader awareness', a sense of the intended readers' interests or problems, which the writing must try to meet. But young writers easily lose sight of their readers while struggling to gather ideas. They perpetrate what Linda Flower[1] calls 'writer-based prose', a first or early draft which is close to the writer's 'inner speech'; it needs to be put through a revision process which edits it into 'reader-based prose'. These terms are helpful in drawing attention to the importance of 'intended readers' and 'reader awareness' throughout the writing process. In a similar way, journalists speak of 'pointing up' their first drafts to capture the attention of readers.

(2) Writing for real readers spells end of artificial school writing. Generations of teachers have acquiesced in the view that adult writing is real while school writing can only be artificial. And indeed it has been artificial. As 'composition', it has been a form of writing *not meant to be read*. Its sole, compulsory 'reader', the teacher, was really only a proofreader, a corrector of surface errors, not a true reader, interested first in the writer's message.

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[1] 'Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing,' *College English* (N.C.T.E.), September 1979, pp. 19-37.

It is this time-hallowed order that the growth of 'in-school publication' in the 1970s has begun to change. *Readers are being found beyond the teacher.* More and more teachers are kicking the habit of one-shot-draft 'compositions' written for the teacher-as-proofreader. They are experimenting widely and often ingeniously with 'publication'. Unfortunately, many of them currently have a blind spot: they tend to be content with publication as *display*. The children's writing goes up on a wallboard or dangles from a mobile or is lost amid elaborate and sometimes irrelevant illustration in a folder or 'book' — but it is little read and less responded to.

We seem to be developing a new, usually more imaginative, 'writing for publication to an audience', which, however, like the old 'composition', will end up as a form of writing *not meant to be read.* The problem stems from lack of understanding of the purpose underlying most writing: we write to create reading-matter for intended readers. It is a problem that is not helped by the current nearly universal use of the phrase 'publication to an audience'. In these TV-addicted times we had better stop talking of 'audiences' for writing. Audiences are shapeless entities satisfied with *viewing.* We need instead to speak concretely of 'readers', in the knowledge that readers will settle for nothing less than interesting reading-matter — which is the same as saying, interesting writing.

When it is clear that the proper goal of 'publication' is to find readers rather than be content with displays, school writing will resume its march away from artificiality and towards writing for readers. Fortunately this is beginning to happen in a small but growing number of classes, especially taking the form of writing 'books' for the classroom library and for younger pupils. It is an example of what needs to become *the key strategy in the future development of school writing:* to find real readers and produce interesting reading matter for them.

Teachers who wish to move towards such a strategy can begin by ceasing to impose artificial writing tasks. This means at least three changes from traditional practice:

- *Stop 'composition' writing!* In the real world, people write articles, reports, letters, stories . . . They never dream of writing a 'composition' — which is a sluggish general term for the fascinating variety of specific forms of prose writing. No child should be subjected in the 1980s to writing a 'composition'.[2]
- *Stop writing for the teacher!* (Unless, of course, a child really wants to.) So many other readers are available. Children discover a great deal of self-motivation when they write for readers who they believe will be interested or impressed by what they write. In the 1980s, writing for the teacher-as-reader need be only one option among many.

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[2] On page 89, some seventy specific terms are offered in place of the generic 'composition'.

- *Stop revising for exercise purposes!* Children should only be asked to revise for the one reason adults have for revising — to clarify and polish their writing for a valued readership. And since so many readers are available, any revising of school writing in the 1980s should have real readers as the purpose underlying both drafting and revising.

As our young writers learn to address real readers, their writing becomes a genuine medium of communication. If we add this function to the two other great functions of school writing — as medium of self-expression and medium of the deepest kind of learning — we realise that the confluence of the ideas of 'process' and 'publication to real readers' is bringing to an end the old order when school writing was universally accepted as an artificial form, a pale reflection of adult writing.

Indeed, can today's 'adult writing' compare in significance with the purposeful writing that is emerging in the schools? Hardly. Except for a tiny minority of professional writers, most adults feel little inducement to write; and what they write, irregularly and usually reluctantly, tends to be only what job or social pressures drag from them. If this is 'real writing', may the schools be spared from it! The path is now wide open for the schools to do much better — and to do it in conditions where the young writers interact directly and personally with their readers.

(3) A new era in school writing is opening.

In the next section we shall look in detail at the range of readers uncovered by the upsurge of in-school publication. Such readers are most readily found within each writer's own classroom, but they are also readily found in other classes, especially in the classes junior to a writer's own.

In fact, the most graphic model for all in-school publication is that of a young writer producing a 'book' for a younger child.[3] The past two years have seen a dramatic upswing in this activity, which is characterised by innumerable resourceful variations. What we are observing here is profoundly significant in half a dozen ways:

.. this is purposeful writing, in contrast to 'compositions';
.. it signals that writing is for reading by real readers;
.. it involves pupil helping pupil in learning;
.. it draws pupils into producing their own learning materials;
.. it calls for largely self-motivated 'full process' writing;
.. it engages every pupil in an exacting but manageable task which is nothing less than the pursuit of excellence.

If the last point seems high-sounding, consider the practical implementation. A child, Peter, in a Year 5 class, 'studies the market' to see where he can find readers for a 'book' that will be written within his range of interests. Learning that a Year 3 class is exploring Greek mythology, he contacts one of the pupils, and undertakes to write a 'book' which will probably be titled *Mount Olympus.* Peter embarks on research, takes copious notes, makes rough sketches and a map. He drafts and revises, helped by his writing partner, by other classmates, and by his teacher. He works hard on his chosen form of publication, writing up the pages clearly, proofreading, illustrating, binding and covering till at last he has produced a handsome 'book'. A protracted and exacting process! To that extent it is a pursuit of excellence, with the young writer's efforts being constructively criticised, checked and on several occasions assisted by other members of his 'writing community'.

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[3] Cf. Robert Protherough: '. . . Pupils need to be helped to develop their work, and to learn from each other as well as from the teacher. This is one reason why more could be done in using pupils' work, both what is produced in the school and printed anthologies, for discussion and stimulus. Often children will respond particularly strongly to the work of those one or two years older than themselves.' *(English in Education,* N.T.A.E., Spring, 1978, p. 18)

There is an important answer here for teachers who ask, 'How can I require children to do anything more than lightly revise their first drafts?' Such trifling revision is completely inadequate for the production of a 'book' which is destined to be placed in a classroom or school library as legitimate learning material. The purpose underlying the project makes anything less than a lengthy and disciplined process unthinkable. Of course, while the book is being intermittently worked on, the child will be carrying out many other kinds of classroom writing. But Peter's *Mount Olympus,* which was finally titled *Gods of Ancient Greece,* was the crown of his whole term's varied writings.

This example shows the extent to which some schools through 'process' and 'in-school publication' have moved into a new era of school writing. Purpose has replaced artificiality. Effective writing has been achieved by every child at his or her own level through an exacting 'full process', assisted when necessary by peers and the teacher. The young book writers search out readers' interests. And these interests turn out to be nothing less than the primary curriculum itself. Purposeful writing for these real readers becomes a valuable contribution to learning within this curriculum, with the children increasingly mobilised as a teaching force.[4] Let us summarise all this before proceeding to consider the readers and the forms of publication that are available . . .

The emerging new order in school writing is one in which a teacher familiar with 'process' sets out to build a classroom writing community by encouraging writing for the widest range of purposes, but centrally emphasising a search for *real readers,* especially among classmates and pupils in other classes. For these specific readers and for whole classes the children produce 'books' and other learning materials — narrative and informational — but only after setting up rigorous publishing objectives ('excellence') which demand great revision and production efforts, a 'full process' which results in worthwhile and inexpensive materials well suited to the readers' needs in terms of diction, style, content and level of difficulty — learning materials that make a valuable contribution to the curriculum.

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[4] Cf. Yetta Goodman: 'We can also learn from our pupils. The roles of teacher and pupil are not mutually exclusive. Within every adult, I believe, is the constant state of the learner, and within the child is the developing state of the teacher. Within all teachers is the ability to interact with children in order to learn from them . . .' (Presidential address to U.S. National Council of Teachers of English, in *English Journal,* N.C.T.E., January, 1979)

(4) Whenever real readers are sought, they are found.

It is possible to classify 'sense of audience' in various ways[5]; for example, by progressive abstraction of the readers from the writer. What results can easily become a long list of categories academically logical but unhelpful in the hurly-burly of primary classroom writing. Let us, for reasons already given, prefer to speak of 'readers' rather than 'audience', and let us now list the schoolchild's potential readers in an order that will look practical to a young writer in search of readers.

(a) *Self as reader.* While 'publishing' may be defined as getting writing to eyes or ears other than those of the writer, 'self' is the only reader of part of what the child writes, particularly his or her notes, first-draft writing, and writing in a diary or journal. As forms of writing which serve the needs of self-expression or discovery, these may never be presented to another reader.

(b) *Readers in the classroom*
.. a writing partner
.. members of a small writing group
.. the whole class
.. the teacher

Reading may take place either 'in-process' or when the process has been completed:

- *'in-process publication'*
  of work-in-progress ('Listen to this sentence', etc.)
  of a just finished first draft
  of a draft-revised-on-the-page
  of the rewritten revised draft
  of the polished final draft ('Will you proof this?')
- *'publication' of the finished MS*
  read by individual children
  read silently by the teacher
  read aloud by the teacher
  read to or by a group
  read to or by the whole class (read aloud, passed around, pinned to a wallboard, read as a 'book' borrowed from the classroom library, etc.).

(c) *Readers in other classes and among school adults*
.. individual pupils in any class
.. another class, especially one junior to that of the writer
.. principal, or deputy, or teachers, or librarian
.. aides, canteen helpers, school secretary
.. the whole school at assembly
.. the whole school reached through a magazine.

(d) *Readers in the neighbourhood and beyond*
.. family: parents and relatives
.. pupils in another school
.. neighbourhood persons and organisations

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[5] The best-known example is the 'Sense of Audience: Category System' in *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)*, by James Britton et al. (Macmillan, 1978), pp. 65-73.

.. penfriends
.. persons beyond the neighbourhood
.. government and other agencies
.. media and personalities: TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc.
.. authors of children's literature.

(5) Publications designed to attract real readers[6]

Not publication for its own sake! Nor to make a 'lovely display'! But, yes, publication designed to attract real readers!

Look at 'The Many Forms of Prose Writing' on page 89 — about 70 forms. Most of these, once written in the classroom, can be conveyed to readers ('published') in some pleasing format. And so can any of the many forms of poetry. The choice is great, and on every occasion there is a need for ingenuity in devising the publishing format that will capture the attention of the intended readers. Let us glance at a few of the more useful formats, while remembering that the long chapter, 'Topics for Writing', contains hundreds of ideas *across the curriculum* for writing which deserves to find readers through 'publication'.

- *Books.* Small 'books' written, illustrated and crafted ('manufactured') by the writer have become by far the most popular and useful format for publishing school writing. They carry 'full-process' original writing on any aspect of the curriculum for which there is a demand by readers, and they are shelved in the classroom or school library or the library of another class. (See a number of suggestions for 'Books of All Sorts, p. 68.)
- *Articles.* Useful articles researched and written by the children may be circulated individually or gathered under a thematic title in a magazine.
- *Letters and Cards.* Every classroom should have its own Mail Box for in-class letter-writing; and the writing of letters to persons further afield needs to be continually encouraged. Similarly there are many opportunities for sending, not commercially produced, but pupil-made cards. (See p. 91.)
- *Newspapers and News Sheets.* These are popular vehicles for classroom writing. Many formats and various contents are possible. In designing them the question needs to be raised, 'Is this being done merely as a writing exercise for the participants or are we seriously trying to reach readers?' (See p. 70.)
- *A Class or School Magazine.* The value of either or both of these can be considerable. (See p. 69.)

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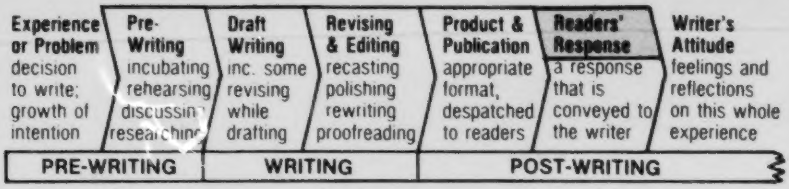
[6] As interest in 'publication' mounted in the 'seventies, P.E.T.A. devoted much attention to it. Pat Edwards wrote her inventive '100 Ways to Publish Children's Writing' for *Better Reading/Writing — Now!* (1977) and R. D. Walshe directed the slide-sequence *Let's Publish Our Writing!* Both publications are still available from P.E.T.A.


Experience or Problem
decision to write; growth of intention
Pre-Writing
incubating rehearsing discussing researching
Draft Writing
inc. some revising while drafting
Revising & Editing
recasting polishing rewriting proofreading
Product & Publication
appropriate format, despatched to readers
Readers' Response
a response that is conveyed to the writer
Writer's Attitude
feelings and reflections on this whole experience
PRE-WRITING
WRITING
POST-WRITING

Response from Readers (and 'Evaluation')

Response Is . . .

Response is a reader showing interest in a writer's work. A writer needs readers, and thoughtful readers can greatly help the writer. Readers are needed not as mere 'communication terminals' but because the writer, anticipating their interests, directs the writing that way, selecting, arranging and styling ideas accordingly. Adult writers are invariably sensitive to readers' responses: positive response is a powerful incentive to write again, while adverse response can bring despair.

Children are even more sensitive. They need, in general, acceptance as writers and they need, in particular, interested readers who will respond to their specific writings. It is the teacher's task to create that sort of environment for them — a 'classroom writing community' — by winning the pupils to the side of positive response to one another's work.

Response is then clearly accepted for what it is anyway, the part of the writing process which completes the post-writing stage (product/publication/response). It is the end part but in a sense it is also a new beginning, for the spirit engendered in the writer by the readers' response enters into the pre-writing stage of the next piece of writing.

The crucial importance of the teaching strategy termed 'in-school publication' lies in its promise to provide every young writer with a variety of interested, responsive readers throughout each school year — not only the teacher but classmates, pupils in other classes, and adults within the school community.[1] This is the most valuable readership imaginable, for it interacts directly and often intimately with the young writers, in a manner that most writers in the wider adult community would envy.

'Response' and 'Evaluation'

Response is too human an act to be reduced to a technique. 'Evaluation', by contrast, has often been thus reduced; and, operated as a technique, it has failed to value many human qualities while busily computing a narrow range of testable skills. In the minds of many teachers, evaluation is associated with never-ending correction/

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[1] See the previous section, 'Publishing', for a classification of readers beyond the school community.

testing/marking/examining — prodigious teacher-effort for little apparent gain in pupil-learning. Yet teachers generally accept the need for keeping *some* evaluation records, first, to meet the demands of principal, parents and next year's teacher for information about the child's progress, and second, to make useful inferences periodically from the accumulating data.

Both 'response' and 'evaluation' carry many meanings. Is it worth distinguishing them? Yes, if only because writing and language-based learning in general gain greatly from *direct responses* which there is little or no time to note down in the 'evaluation records' — expressions of feeling and specific questions, for example.

For writing, let us make a simple distinction:

- *response* is part of the writing process and consists of spoken or written comments (not to mention non-verbal expressions) made to the writer during or soon after the writing of a specific piece;
- *evaluation* is a longer-term operation characterised by accumulation of written records and work samples, an accumulation that can be analysed from time to time to reveal patterns of growth which might not have been noticed by shorter-term response.

With little time in the school day, what can the busy teacher of writing do about response and evaluation? First, try to maximise *response*, in the knowledge that it can come daily, spontaneously from many readers, not only from the teacher. Second, keep *evaluation records* to essentials, in the knowledge that compiling them bites hard into available time. (We will later discuss 'pupil self-evaluation' and 'peer evaluation'.)

The Responsive Teacher of Writing

It would be easy to list twenty ideal qualities of a responsive teacher of writing. Instead let us prefer to ask only that the teacher be a genuine *reader* of children's writing.[2] Not just a proofreader, much less a fault-finder, but a reader interested first in the child's message (content).

A reader approaches a writer with respect — and questions. If the teacher and other in-school readers do only this, they lay the foundation for the child's self-respect and confidence as a writer. They will be primarily looking for what the child *can do,* and will not allow weaknesses in the writing to overshadow their perception of the message; at best, indeed, they will believe, beyond the weaknesses, in the child's potential for development as a writer.

For the rest, the teacher will want to know

- when to respond
- what to look for, and
- what evaluation records to keep . . .

When to Respond

In the past a 'composition' was only 'marked' when it was completed and handed in. Now, perceiving that response is part of the writing process, we can be much more flexible. Reading and response can take place 'in process' as well as when the writing is completed. Thus there may be:

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[2] Cf. Robert J. Tierney and Jill LaZansky, 'The Rights and Responsibilities of Readers and Writers: a Contractual Agreement', in *Language Arts,* N.C.T.E., September 1980.

- *'pre-writing response'*
  when a reader-to-be hears the writer's problems or plans and comments helpfully. (See the 'Conference Approach', p. 121, on the value of this response.)
- *'in-process response'*
  to work-in-progress
  to a just finished first draft
  to a draft-revised-on-the page
  to a rewritten revised draft prior to final polishing
  — especially helpful, in the view of many writers young and old, is response to a first draft.
- *'post-writing response'*
  can come from a much wider readership than the teacher (see 'publication of the finished MS', p. 68).

What to Look For

We must not smother a young writer in excessive talk about writing. There comes a point beyond which a reader's interest can cease to be helpful and instead become fatiguing or meddlesome or threatening — if, for example, it urges what may seem difficult to a child.

The best, most helpful responses of a reader to a young writer will probably be:

(a) broad, brief indications of approval
(b) specific questions on the given piece of writing.

The indications of approval would be directed at any manifestations of what are probably the four *attitudes* most likely to lead to development in writing:

.. willingness to *write*
.. willingness to *work at a subject*
.. willingness to *consider readers*
.. willingness to *use one's resources of written language to the limit.*

All four are states of interest or openness. They are invisible and unquantifiable and they are seldom done justice in schemes of 'evaluation'. But a responsive reader — especially the teacher — can readily notice them and praise them with a brief word or gesture.

As to specific questions (and readiness to listen to the replies), below is the broadest of guides to possible key questions. It is arranged under the four headings we have used to indicate the essential elements of the 'writing situation' (p. 23): *the WRITER decides on a purpose in relation to READERS and proceeds to review relevant IDEAS, selecting and arranging these in accordance with a grasp of CRAFT.*

• A READER'S GUIDE TO POSSIBLE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WRITING

1. *Some questions about the feelings of the WRITER:*
   What made you choose this topic? (intention, purpose)
   Do you feel satisfied with what you've written?
2. *Some questions about the writer's attitude to the READERS:*
   Who are your intended readers?
   Do you think your opening will 'grab' their attention?
   How about reading it back, with 'reader awareness', as if you are seeing it through a reader's eyes?

3. *Some questions about the writer's grasp of IDEAS:*
   How did you come by these ideas? (experience/reading/TV, etc.)
   What is the main idea you wanted to get across to your readers?
   Asking open-ended questions about the specific content of a piece is generally the easiest and most effective single way to respond.

4. *Some questions about the writer's grasp of CRAFT:*
   Are you happy with the opening/conclusion?
   Have you checked the 'mechanics' in a final proofreading?
   If the reader comes to specific questions about craft only after showing interest in the writer's feelings and ideas, then the writer accepts that the intention is to help in presenting the ideas more forcefully.

Keeping Evaluation Records

Innumerable evaluation techniques are available, as every teacher knows. Most of them demand more time than a busy primary teacher can possibly give. Here then are just three kinds of cumulative records, together with the contention that they are not unduly time-consuming and yet are adequate for the twin purposes of, first, helping the child, and, second, providing information about the child's progress to the principal, parents, and next year's teacher.

(1) *Keep an Anecdotal Record.* This is a 'profile' or 'log' or 'informal assessment' — day by day jottings which record observations and intuitions about a child's strengths and weaknesses. It can be made as detailed and voluminous as a teacher's time and energy permit, commenting on attitudes and qualities as well as specific skills, and above all recording signs of growth. Over a year, a comprehensive 'profile' of a child's writing builds up, and helpful inferences can be made by the teacher. (A double-page spread is advisable for each child.)

(2) *Keep Work Samples.* While each child's entire writing folder is the ultimate 'work sample', development shows more graphically if, instead, periodic selections are kept — say, monthly. The best work should be sampled so as to show what the child *can do*. Highly desirable too is some sampling of examples of 'process', that is, the draft, revisions and final published form of a piece of writing. This is particularly valuable for explaining 'process' to parents. An additional work-sample method used enthusiastically by some teachers is the fortnightly or monthly 'Class Book': each child contributes his or her best piece of writing, which is inserted in an impressive, illustrated, well designed 'book'; the series of books accumulates in the classroom library, as both reading material and evaluation record.

(3) *Children Keep Their Own Record.* As but one form of self-evaluation, each child keeps a growing list of 'Things I Can Do', not only the mechanical skills but anything seen as a new ability ('I told a joke', 'I wrote a story about space', 'I wrote a business letter', etc.). (For other ideas, see 'Self-evaluation', below.) The teacher periodically reviews this record in conference with the child.

Questions on Other Issues of Response and Evaluation

(1) *Pupil-involvement in evaluation — is it desirable?* Certainly. The old order in which the teacher was the sole evaluator bred an unhealthy dependence. Let us instead set the pupils on the road to self-reliance. Of course this can only *begin* in the primary school and will continue throughout secondary. However, the beginning can be a significant one if a vigorous 'writing community' develops, with plenty of in-school publication, reading of one another's work, and thoughtful response. In addition there is scope for using some of the ideas on 'goal-setting', 'self-evaluation', and 'peer evaluation' which follow.

(2) *Goal-setting — what is a good way to go about it?* Very gently, as always in primary! You are asking the children to choose and set personal goals about improving their future writing. Such goals should be few and specific, and they should be written down. A good method is to hold a class (or group) discussion of current writing problems, then ask everyone to set goals, which you might discuss later as you get round to individual conferences.

(3) *Self-evaluation — what does this amount to?* Don't let the term mystify you. As a child edits his or her own draft — that is, 'self-edits' — this is obviously self-evaluation taking place. It takes place too when the teacher, in individual conference, questions the child about a piece of writing. You can push the practice further in various ways. For example, ask the child to prepare for a conference *by* underlining (or placing a stroke beside) the best phrases or passages, *by* placing a cross beside unsatisfactory writing which needs the teacher's help, *by* rating the whole piece as best/good/average/poor/bad, and *by* being ready to justify any of these aspects of self-evaluation. At the end of the year or end of a major writing experience, why not ask pupils to draw up their own Reports for sending to parents? (e.g. 'I have recently learnt a number of useful things about writing . . .'[3]) Any session of self-evaluation can lead naturally to individualised goal-setting.

(4) *Peer-evaluation — how important is it?* Extremely. Peers are *readers* responding very directly to one another's writing. If the teacher has cultivated an environment in which the children listen to, read and comment on one another's work, the learning rate rises sharply because they take even more notice of their peers' opinions than of the teacher's. We have already discussed the value of children working with a 'writing partner' or small group — revising and editing, for instance, can thus become more palatable to some young writers than when they work alone. (See the preceding sections on 'Revising', and 'Publishing', and the discussion above of 'Response from Readers.')

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[3] I am indebted for this idea to Ernie Tucker, English Master, Maroubra Girls High School.

R. D. Walshe

The Four Essentials of a Balanced Writing Program

1. Writing is important

- The child frequently hears the teacher promote the importance of writing: in learning, careers and social life, and in self-expression and self-understanding.
- The child is even more impressed when the teacher, demonstrating regard for writing,
  - (a) allows ample time for it daily;
  - (b) sets up a 'workshop' environment which influences the class to want to write;
  - (c) regularly reads aloud to convey the 'sound of words on paper';
  - (d) sometimes writes with the class to model and share the craft with the learners.
- Having engaged a willingness to write, the teacher sustains interest by fostering
  - — a confident control of craft (see 2)
  - — a sense of ownership of topics (see 3)
  - — a responsive readership (see 4).

2. Writing is a craft

- The teacher continually explains that while writing has much in common with speech it also has important differences and these make it a craft to be mastered.
- Key concern of the program is to provide opportunities to practise the 'writing process' so that each child will make progress in evolving a fluent, flexible individual control of 'process' (the cycle-of-craft which produces writing and is broadly definable as pre-writing, drafting-editing, post-writing).
- As they practise the 'process', helped by the teacher and by models from good literature, the young writers help one another, continually raising the technical issues of composing: handwriting, spelling, punctuation; vocabulary and usage; grammar and syntax; form and genre.

THE WRITER **THE CRAFT**

THE WRITING **THE READERS**

3. Writing is mainly learned by writing

- Topics? The child is assured a degree of freedom in topic-choice as the basis of a sense of owning the writing; otherwise little originality can be expected. The teacher is aware of a descending scale of 'ownership':
  - (a) self-chosen experience-based topics;
  - (b) school-designed 'lifelike situations';
  - (c) some choice within subject limits;
  - (d) prescription by the teacher (no choice).
- 'Invention', the finding of ideas before and during writing and revising, can be cultivated by practising procedures such as pondering ('rehearsal'), talking, questioning, reading, researching, brainstorming, jotting notes, freewriting, and editing.
- Quantity and regularity, essential for 'learning to write by writing', can easily be achieved while handling a variety of subjects and forms of writing across-the-curriculum.

4. Writing is intended for readers

- A writer needs readers. The classroom that is developing as a 'writing community' guarantees the child a basic, interested readership concerned as much with writing-in-progress as with completed writing. Periodically too the child writes for a variety of readers beyond the classroom.
- The more detailed the response from readers the better, whether spoken or written; certainly individual 'conference' of child-with-teacher (and child-with-child) is valuable whenever the teacher can manage it. The teacher, sensitive to child, message and form, is especially attentive to the 'process' underlying the writing.
- Readers, by their critical response, stimulate the writer's search for a good writing style. (For most purposes a clear, lively, moderately informal prose style, as in good journalism?)

Abundant reading and purposeful talk interweave continually with the writing.
Parents need to be kept informed of the teacher's writing policy.

The teacher works out a specific application of these 'Essentials' to the given class, K-12.

PART III

Topics for Writing

A. The 'Good Topic' — set by us or found by them?

CONTENTS

1. What can I write about?
2. Imposed topics usually fail
3. The secret of topics that succeed
4. Liberation of the teacher from topic-finding
5. Maximising children's 'ownership' of topics
6. Helping the move from topic to 'invention'.

1. What can I write about?

'You can write about anything!'

Well, almost anything. There are of course other expressive mediums — painting, music, dance, for instance. They 'say' things that can't be said in words. But, this quibble aside, yes, one can write about nearly everything.

That is why a long list of topics is self-defeating, whether it is 'Two Hundred Practical and Creative Writing Ideas'[1] or 'A Thousand Topics for Composition'[2] — to name two well-known examples. Why not 'Ten Thousand'? Or 'Fifty Thousand'? A long list gets boring; it diminishes the desire to write.

Much more valuable for teachers than a list of 'topics that *might* interest them' would be an understanding of how individual children can themselves discover topics — topics that *really* interest them — and also how, in the pre-writing period, they can set about 'gathering' or 'incubating' or 'inventing' the ideas that will, when sufficiently accumulated, impel them into writing a draft. But is such an understanding possible?

2. Imposed topics usually fail

Writing is one of the most complex of human activities. To be done successfully it needs the mental-emotional-physical involvement of the whole person. An imposed topic seldom arouses interest; it is not 'owned' by the student, and so it usually results in crabbed, mechanical writing.

No wonder the American novelist Flannery O'Connor said: 'Experiment but for heaven sakes don't do writing exercises. You will never be interested in anything that is just an exercise and there is no reason you should'.

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[1] *Sparkling Words: Two Hundred Practical and Creative Writing Ideas*, by Ruth Kearney Carlson (distrib. by N.C.T.E., Urbana, Illinois, 1965, 1968).

[2] *A Thousand Topics for Composition*, by the Illinois Assn of Teachers of English (Urbana, Illinois, 2nd ed. 1980).

3. The secret of topics that succeed

Writing topics that succeed are almost always those that have a base in children's experiences, either their past experiences or present classroom ones. The child does not exist who has had no experiences.[3] And children go on having new experiences all the time, many of which are worth writing about: things that happen in the home, the neighbourhood, the classroom, the playground and, importantly, the imagination, not to mention all the vicarious experiences that take place while reading, watching TV, and listening to radio.

In other words, there is in every child an extensive *experience resource of writing energy*. To tap into it, teachers must invite children to devise their own topics and must help those who lack the confidence to do so. In Donald Graves' metaphor, 'ownership' is what the child needs:

> 'When people own a place, they look after it; but when it belongs to someone else, they couldn't care less. It's that way with writing. From the first day of school we must leave control of the writing with the child — the choice of topic and the writing itself. Then children write more and care more, even about the appearance of the writing on the page. We teachers must become totally aware of our awful daily temptation to take control away from them, whether by too much prescription or correction or even advice.
>
> 'Nothing influences a child's attitude to writing more than the choice of topic. If the child has chosen it and if the teacher shows genuine interest in it, then there's no limit to the effort the child will make. Young children who are given this power soon become confident in choosing topics — not always quick to do so but quite responsible about it, giving the matter deep consideration.'[4]

Janet Emig, a leader of research into composition, has expressed her enthusiasm for Donald Graves' findings: 'I would recommend much unassigned work. In [his] research with second graders, where children were allowed to write whenever they wanted to write, they wrote approximately four times as much as the students did where writing was assigned.'[5] What Graves has found to be true for young schoolchildren has also been found true for the last years of schooling:

> 'Freedom to choose what they wanted to write about, especially when it involved their own feelings, interests, ideas and opinions, was what "turned students on" to writing most. Creative writing, particularly of stories and novels, was the kind of writing task most enjoyed by students and the kind of writing that they would have liked more of; indeed, many students saw the lack of opportunity to write creatively as a fault in the school system.'[6]

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[3] Several studies of the 'writings' of preschool children, have shown that they 'write' messages rooted in self-chosen areas of experience. For example: '. . . preschool children almost always produced writings that were in some sense discourse. Although their invented orthographics may owe little to English, the "things they could write" had semantic intent. They wrote real messages.' (John C. Stansell, 'The Language of Print', in *English Education*, N.C.T.E., February, 1981, p. 24.)

[4] *Donald Graves in Australia*, ed. R. D. Walshe (P.E.T.A., Sydney, 1981), p. 9.

[5] Janet Emig, interviewed in *English Journal*, N.C.T.E., October, 1979, p. 12.

[6] Adrienne Walker, in *English in Australia*, A.A.T.E., September, 1980, p. 26, reporting the views of 245 students from Years 10, 11 and 12 on writing experiences that 'Turned Them On or Off or Both'; part of a research project, 'The Development of Writing Abilities 15-18 Years', directed by Bruce Bennett, University of Western Australia.

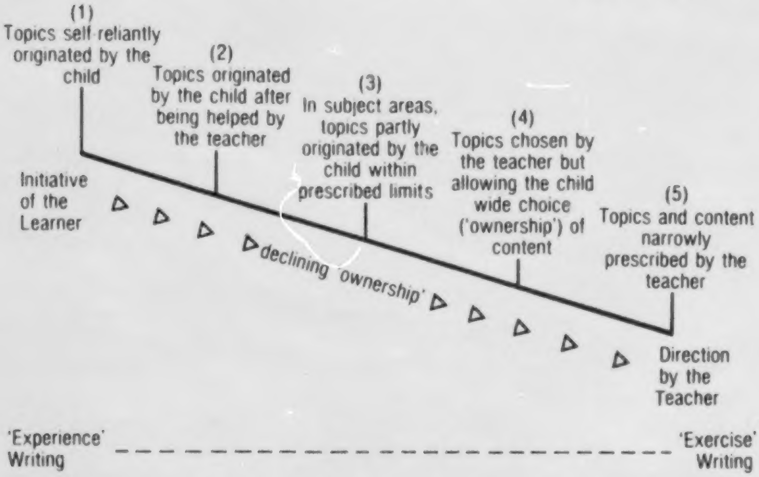
4. Liberation of the teacher from topic-finding

The teacher's traditional role is transformed once the greater part of topic choice is turned over to the child. Owning promotes caring, a concern about *what* is written and *how*. The teacher is freed from the thankless task of thinking up and imposing topics, and freed too from marking the poor writing that results when a child lacks interest. With the child now feeling a desire to write well — to redraft, polish and publish — the teacher has time to assist the child to achieve quality writing.

5. Maximising children's sense of ownership of topics

In the matter of topic choice it is valuable to be aware of *a range of potential 'ownership': first* and best, the teacher can offer as much freedom as possible in the hope that children will originate their own topics; *second,* the teacher can actively help children to value their experiences as sources of writing topics; *third,* in prescribed subject areas, the teacher can allow as much freedom of choice as possible within the curriculum limits; *fourth,* the teacher can choose the topic/experience/stimulus but allow the children wide choice or 'ownership' of content; *fifth* and least, there remain only compulsory topics, very seldom if at all necessary in the primary school. This range of options can be represented as:

The Child's Range of 'Ownership' of Writing Topics


(1)
Topics self-reliantly originated by the child
(2)
Topics originated by the child after being helped by the teacher
(3)
In subject areas, topics partly originated by the child within prescribed limits
(4)
Topics chosen by the teacher but allowing the child wide choice ('ownership') of content
(5)
Topics and content narrowly prescribed by the teacher
Initiative of the Learner
declining 'ownership'
Direction by the Teacher
'Experience' Writing
'Exercise' Writing

This range of topic ownership is treated in considerable detail in Part B, p. 64. Before coming to it, let's consider what can be done to help children find ideas once a topic has been chosen.

6. Helping the child to move from topic to invention

With the topic or topic-area selected, the child needs to ask two questions: 'Is it too broad?' and 'What can I say about it?' The questions fall within the realm of what has been called since the rhetoricians of ancient Greece *invention*. 'Invention' is the art of discovery of the subject matter of writing and speech-making. A distinguished authority on the teaching of writing, Edward P. J. Corbett, says that invention is 'the most crucial part of the composition process.'[7]

(a) *Is the topic too broad?* Professional writers know they must always 'limit the subject'. It is a principle that is often undervalued by teachers who don't write with their classes, sharing the pains of composition. We need to say to children, 'Turn a bafflingly general topic such as *Pollution* into a specific issue or problem, e.g. *Pollution Is Increasing World-wide*, or *What Are the Pollution Problems of My Locality?*'

(b) *What can I say about the topic?* Having limited the topic, the child faces a blank page and some tough questions (or doubts): how shall I begin? what ideas shall I use? and in what order shall I arrange them? To assist, the teacher may recommend one or more of these *invention procedures:*

i. *Talk it over.* A topic can be discussed by the whole class, by a group, by writing partners, or by teacher and child.

ii. *Draw it.* Beginning writers, as Donald Graves and other researchers have shown, often collect and clarify their thoughts by drawing and only then do they find that they can write.

iii. *Read about it.* Further information can be methodically sought by reading, note-making, and other forms of research.

iv. *Brainstorm it.* The class, a group or the individual child can spend 5-10 minutes writing down whatever words, phrases and sentences come to mind — an act of free association of everything related to the topic, however tenuously. *Variations of this brainstorming are possible*, e.g. under the topic heading the children write down their 'first thoughts'; discuss the topic as a class or group, with everyone reporting and developing the first thoughts and jotting down new ideas; sort the 'first thoughts' and 'jottings' into some order; and/or write 'second thoughts' (and perhaps polish and circulate them for reading around groups).

v. *Consider the reader.* The writer thinks hard about the reader(s) of the projected writing. This is 'reader awareness', the basic courtesy every writer owes to his or her reader: 'What precisely will my reader expect to learn from the piece?' This little discipline always rewards the writer with ideas, including often the 'lead' which gets the writing moving.

vi. *Use the 5Ws of journalism.* Here is a useful mnemonic. Journalists check their stories by asking *Who? What? Where? When? Why?* and perhaps also *How?* They can then feel confident they haven't left out any information a reader would consider essential.

vii. *Use Burke's 'pentad'.* While the *5Ws* is surely enough to guide most primary narrative writing, the teacher may memorise and use as a checklist the more searching 'pentad' suggested by Kenneth Burke[8]:

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[7] In *College Composition and Communication* (N.C.T.E.), February, 1981, p. 87. Corbett is the author of *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (O.U.P., 2nd Ed., 1971).

[8] *A Grammar of Motives* (Prentice-Hall, N.Y., 1945), p. xv.

Any complete statement about motives will offer answers to five questions — What was done *(act)*? When or where was it done *(scene)*? Who did it *(agent)*? How did he do it *(agency)*? and Why *(purpose)*?

viii. *Use a specific checklist.* The *5 Ws* or the 'pentad' serve well enough for narrative writing but some teachers feel a need for other checklists of questions to guide students in handling other kinds of writing (e.g. for a science problem: what happened? what were the causes? what were the immediate effects? were there any wider effects or relationships? what might have modified or averted what happened? etc.).

ix. *Try out 'leads'.* At an advanced stage of invention, the writing of 'leads' from various viewpoints can produce one which releases the desired flow and sequence of ideas.

(c) *Developing children's ability to ask questions.* At the base of the seven invention procedures lies *questioning* — a need on the writer's part to ask questions of a situation, a problem, a book or a person. All ideas for writing originate in a writer's questioning attitude, and the flexible and persistent questioner is always rewarded with an abundance of ideas. Fortunately teachers can do a great deal to cultivate the easy art of asking questions — it is, after all, an art obviously latent in everyone.

For example, the teacher can simply produce an object, no matter how simple, and say, 'Please ask me questions about this fountain pen' (or whatever). To each question she answers briefly, providing only as much as the question specifically asks. Children are amazed at how many questions can be asked and how much information can be elicited. The questions usually focus first on the physical properties of the object but they extend to relationships, of object with owner, with maker, with competitors, etc., virtually without limit in our interrelated universe; yet relevance, specificity and precision can mark every step in this simple exploration. Children can bring in objects and themselves answer the questions of classmates. Later, visitors can be invited to meet the class and answer questions about their lives, careers, interests . . . Children's questioning flexibility grows and with it a realisation that 'There's so much to write about!'

(d) *Invention continues during writing.* In recent years, with the shift of interest from product to process, 'invention' has often been discussed synonymously with the 'pre-writing' stage of the process; but to do this is to imply that the search for ideas ends with the beginning of writing. It doesn't. Researchers of the process of writing, such as Donald M. Murray,[*] deplore the effect on students of advice like that of Sir Ernest Gowers in his well-known *Complete Plain Words* (Pelican 1962): 'It is wise therefore not to begin to write until you are quite certain what you want to say' (p. 15). They deplore it because the writing itself can be a discovery process, a means of finding out. James Joyce knew this well: 'It is in the writing that good things come out.'

Of course it is helpful to marshal some ideas before starting a draft, but a writer must also remain open to further ideas during drafting and revising. Even the old dictum, 'Plan before you write', is highly suspect. It imposes a discipline which while acceptable to some children will freeze others who *need the flow of writing to help their invention of ideas.* They will be better able to plan *after* writing a first draft, if a plan is necessary at all.

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[*] This is an important theme in many of Murray's writings, especially in 'Writing as Process: How Writing Finds it own Meaning', in *Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition*, ed. Donovan and McClelland (N.C.T.E., Urbana, Illinois, 1980).

B. Writing Topics — across a range of 'ownership' by the child

CONTENTS

1. The self-reliant origination of topics by the child
2. Ways to assist the child to originate topics
3. In subject areas, partial origination of topics
4. Choice from topics originated by the teacher

1. The self-reliant origination of topics by the child

We must repeatedly say to children, 'You will write best about what interests you most — and that's why I like you to find your own topics.' And we will praise those who do, for we know the development in their writing will be rapid.

But we also know, alas, that even professional writers have 'down times' when the topic doesn't come. So painful do they find these times that they cultivate 'topic vigilance', keeping an antenna always raised as they move through life's experiences — a pen that jots observations in a journal. Sooner or later, they know, a scanning of the journal will reveal topics for articles or stories.

Here are some classroom influences, of the non-directive kind, that can be nurtured by the teacher in the hope that they will generate a 'topic vigilance' among the children:

(a) *Encourage casual scribbling.* Writing is a fruitful externalising of thought. Its rewards are freely available to anyone who takes the trouble to use a pen. Let's make picking up a pen in the classroom an easy and virtuous habit. For example, encourage children to scribble about everything, especially their tentative 'first thoughts'. And why not also legitimise their note-passing — even have sessions of it, even facilitate it by means of a Classroom Mailbox?

(b) *Encourage the keeping of a Journal.* A Journal is mainly for jotting of ideas and observations but also for interesting clippings, copied passages from reading, and whatever else is of personal interest.

(c) *Encourage 'Make it messy to make it clear!'* This arresting slogan from Donald Graves' Writing Process Laboratory doesn't advocate messing for its own sake but in order to improve a draft before rewriting — messing by way of *adding* words to fill out meaning, *changing* words to achieve exactness, *deleting* words to tighten sentences, *sharpening* punctuation to make reading easier, and *rearranging* words, sentences or paragraphs to produce a better order of explanation. Once children see that a draft doesn't need to be kept neat, that it is only a 'rough' to be worked on, they lose many inhibitions about the difficulty of producing original writing.

(d) *Keep all draft writings.* By no means all drafts are revised in the manner suggested by (c). In classroom conditions most writing is usually left at first draft stage and only select pieces are (fairly regularly) put through full-process treatment. But all drafts should be kept. They become a resource, like the Journal, in which topics may later be found; or a well-thought-of draft may be taken up at any time and be made the subject of 'polishing for publication'.

(e) *Keep a continually growing personal list of 'Possible Topics'.* Each child can keep such a list, perhaps on an inside cover of the Writing Folder or Book.

(f) *Each term, put up a 'Top Twenty' chart.* This is a means of encouraging class discussion of 'good topics'. Current interests are brainstormed and ten or twenty are decided on. They are in no way prescriptive; at best, individuals may add one or two to their personal lists of 'Possible Topics'.

(g) *Arrange 'writing partners'.* This can be a powerful institution, ensuring that each child has a peer with whom writing is exchanged, read and discussed critically. The relationship invariably helps to generate topics (cf. Frank Whitehead on 'a climate of personal relationships', below).

(h) *Cultivate a classroom 'writing community'.* Underlying all the particular influences above is the teacher's desire to create a 'writing community'. It will be manifest when children say, 'We write well in this class and help one another to solve problems' — a spirit achieved when a teacher continually promotes the importance of writing, does some writing with the children, expects a quantity of writing, some of it in full-process conditions, and responds helpfully to all efforts.

> . . . there is somewhere a friend or loved one with whom the tongue can be unlocked, the inner life talked about. The real problem that the teacher of English has to face is not how to supply his pupils with 'matter' to write about; it is rather how to develop within the classroom a climate of personal relationships within which it becomes possible for them to write about the concerns which already matter to them intensely.
>
> — Frank Whitehead, *Creative Experiment: Writing and the Teacher* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1970), p. 85.

(i) *Provide opportunities to publish.* The lure of publication always helps to generate topics and writing. Possible forms of classroom publication are treated in the next section.

2. Ways to assist the child to originate topics

Though given completely free choice, children often can't hit on a topic. They may lack confidence or may simply be suffering from temporary 'writer's block'. They need the teacher or a writing partner to 'help it happen' — which usually means helping them to value as a subject for writing some interest or experience that 'I didn't think anyone else could possibly want to know about'. Teachers need to operate from a conviction that all children have a store of such interests and experiences. Here are some ways to help children discover the topics in that store.

(a) *'The Conference'.* This emerged in the 1970s as the most significant single way to 'help it happen': a one-to-one talk, usually in classroom time, between child and teacher, with the teacher in a questioning role: 'What do you think you'll write about next . . . What might you cover?' Ideally the teacher already knows a good deal about the child's interests, even keeps a record of them, and so may ask pointed questions. Conferences are typically brief, 2-5 minutes, but may extend in special cases. (See p. 124.)

(b) *Group conference.* When the teacher runs out of time for individual conferencing, a group — the one currently using the Writing Area? — may be questioned about their next writing. This may lead to individual topics or a collective one. Of course the teacher may do the same on a whole-class level, but much less satisfactorily.

(c) *Peer interviewing.* In pairs, children take turns at interviewing each other in search of a topic. The pairs may already be established 'writing partners' or — to give added stimulus — may be decreed by the teacher for the specific purpose.

(d) *Cards and interviewing.* The teacher pairs the children then issues each with a number of cards (not larger than 15cm x 10cm). On the *first card,* each child lists 3-4 interests or problems that come to mind from recent experiences; then, in turn, the partners discuss each other's list. Each then chooses one item from his or her own list and on the *second card,* under a provisional title, brainstorms this topic by jotting down phrases in whatever order they come to mind. Already a lot of ideas are on the move. Beyond this point of broad topic choice the experiment can be developed in a variety of ways, e.g. a *third card* may be used for free writing about the topic, *or* to get the brainstormed ideas into a meaningful order, *or* to write a first draft. Or all of these things may be done on separate cards, interspersed by partner-conference, with culminating production of a polished draft.

(e) *Starting with drawing.* To draw or paint first is often the significant means by which young children discover a writing topic and ideas to write about. *Variations:* (i) The child draws on a sheet which has a few widely spaced lines at the bottom, then writes on these lines about the drawing; (ii) the child folds a large sheet of paper into four parts then draws a character (person or animal) in the first quarter, something the character likes doing in the second, something that happens to the character in the third, and an ending (happily ever after?) in the fourth — with captions under each picture.

(f) *'5-minute writing'.* Obviously non-threatening, this kind of writing can stimulate thought and contribute to fluency. The teacher will encourage free choice of topics but may also allow a two-minute conference between writing partners on what each will write about, and will also scribble a few topics on the board to prompt the sufferers from 'writer's block'. Out of this writing may come topics for more extensive writing. (Sometimes brief sessions of writing like this are termed 'Silent Writing Time'.)

(g) *The many varieties of free writing.* It is a fact of life that moment by moment there are always words in our heads. Free writing is a means of tracking these words, and the tracks can lead to interests worth writing about.

'I've got nothing to write about,' says a child.

'Fine! There you have a clear opening sentence. Get it down and see what's next in your thoughts — get that down too and keep going. Not all your thoughts will come in sentences, but just write down whatever word or phrase or sentence is there, no matter if it seems a bit disjointed. Don't let your pen stop. At the end of the session (5-10 minutes) you can read it back and see if a topic has somewhere suggested itself. Or your writing partner or group can read it and question you in search of a topic.'

Here is an incredible truth: behind every point (phrase or sentence) of a piece of personal writing, including free writing, lies a crowd of ideas which the writer, if questioned, can announce orally — and often get excited about. Free writing can be an incomparable means by which less fluent children bring these latent ideas to the forefront.

Some varieties of free writing can be distinguished:

- *Journal Writing:* The best free writing is the voluntary regular writing of a child in his or her Journal.
- *Stream of Consciousness* (or 'Streaming'): 'Write, without pausing, whatever comes into your head.'
- *Speed Writing:* 'See how many words you can write, in X minutes, legibly enough to be read by your writing partner.'
- *Completions* (or 'Slams'): 'How much story can you add to that sentence (or phrase) in X minutes?' (When time is up, children may read aloud what they have written and flow on orally to complete their stories).
- *Mood Writing:* 'Write whatever words your present mood brings to mind.' (Or play music, show colours, etc., to create a mood.)
- *SSW* ('Silent, sustained writing'): A period of X minutes a day, every day, when everyone writes freely, perhaps in the Journal. One form of this could be the '5-minute writing' in (f) above.
- *Possible-topic Free Writing:* If a 'possible topic' or 'topic area' comes to mind, make it the subject of a free association splurge to see if anything valuable crystallises.

(h) *Attending to one's senses.* If carried out in a relaxed atmosphere, 'sense writing' is close to free writing (but it can be carried out rigorously too). There is reason to believe humans *think* too much and *sense* too little. To attend to one's senses is to be presented with infinite data — another resource of writing. Fortunately children need only a small shift of focus to become absorbed in the world that is being presented all the time by their senses. Here are a few possibilities for each sense:

- *A Clear Eye.* 'Name as much as you can of what you see in the room.' (A long list! Then, similarly, do some real looking outdoors.) Or 'Let's find names for the colours in the room'. Or 'Look at this pencil (or brick or tomato) and describe it so clearly that even a visitor from another planet will recognise it'.

- *An Attentive Ear.* 'Let's have a Quiet Time while we note every sound from outside and inside the room, no matter how faint.' Or someone at the back of the room makes a variety of not uncommon noises which the class tries to identify, e.g. a pencil being sharpened, tea being stirred. Or children tape-record sounds for identification.
- *A Sensitive Nose.* 'Move around the room and note down ten distinctive smells — bodies excepted, unless it's your own' (e.g. pencil shavings, a new book, new plastic). Outdoors, smell crushed leaves, earth, garbage bins, drains, etc. Children will readily bring in scores of smellable things.
- *A Keen Taste.* This sense presents difficulties in class. Begin with, 'There isn't a second of our lives when we aren't tasting something — what?' The taste in our mouths. 'How does it change throughout the day?' Experiment with a durable sweet: issue one to be sucked slowly and reported at two-minute intervals. 'What finally takes the place of the sweetness?' Chop up lemons to taste, talk and write about. Eat lunch in class, noting tastes . . .
- *A Delicate Touch.* All around us are things to touch. On a hot day, ask, 'What things are touching you, with what effects?' Collect objects with distinctive textures . . . Put ten common objects in a closed box into which the children can reach, touch and recognise, e.g. a sponge, golfball, eraser.
- *Other Sens-ible Ideas Galore: 'From Where I Sit'* — what are my 5 senses recording? *'A Sensory Walk'* — make brief notes of main sense impressions and later write up the notes. *'This Book Makes Sense'* — a large-page book consisting of five page-openings, each to be filled with drawings, objects and words relevant to one sense.

(i) *Providing publishing opportunities.* Offered a chance to be published, few children (or adults) will turn it down. In the school context, 'publication' usually means any presentation of writing to readers beyond the teacher. It is a prospect that adds purpose to the writing and an obligation to strive for interest, polish and correctness through revision and rewriting. (See the importance of readers to a writer, in the section on 'Publishing', p. 46.) *Here is a range of possible publishing projects:*

- *Displays on classroom wallboards.* This is the easiest and currently the most common form of publication of individual pieces of writing. (Its limitation is that the writing, though viewed, is often not read.)
- *Displays in other places.* For example, in corridors, assembly hall, entrance foyer, and library; and a local business or bank will occasionally welcome a special display.
- *'Publish one in four'.* The teacher says, 'When you have written four pieces we will review them and select one for publication as a book.'
- *Books of all sorts.* There is no limit to the ingenuity children are capable of in dreaming up topics, content and form of their original books: Illustrated story books, Fantasy and futurism books, How-to books, Poetry and song lyric anthologies, Biographies with photos, Recipe books, Cartoon or comic books, Miscellanies of cuttings, copyings, drawings, jokes, poems, graffiti, Shape books in the form

of a flower, house, toy, and so on. Prodigious craft effort is often poured into the physical production.

- *Class poetry book.* As the culmination of original poetry writing, everyone selects, polishes and presents pieces to an editorial group. The result is a lovingly crafted book, a fine addition to the classroom library.
- *Books for other classes.* 'Let's write a book for a junior class' — a project valuable for the juniors as readers and the seniors as writers. *A well-conceived example*[1]: (i) the infants teacher prepares her children for a visit from a primary class, each child thinking up a story to tell to one of the visitors; (ii) the meeting takes place, the stories are told one-to-one, the older child solemnly takes notes and repeats the story orally till the younger child is satisfied; (iii) the primary children take leave, each writes up the story, revises and polishes it, and makes an illustrated book; (iv) a big occasion is made of the return visit — the books are presented, read word by word several times, and left as an important reading resource of the infants classroom. N.B. *This idea can easily be adapted to visits between other classes.*
- *Books from experts.* Each child is rostered as 'Expert for a Day' to give a talk and be questioned on a special interest or hobby. Later the talk is turned into an illustrated book. A highly individual project! This, however, is only the beginning of what deserves to become a steady, year-round writing of books by these experts. We should regard the children as 'resource persons' with expert knowledge on aspects of TV, films, fashions, games, music, parents, brothers, sisters, books they have read, etc.
- *Fortnightly 'class book'.* At regular intervals, say, fortnightly, each child selects his or her best draft on any subject and revises it intensively for publication in the 'class book' (or magazine). The book is given a dramatic title which is emblazoned on an illustrated, coloured cover and into this the children's work, polished and illustrated, is taped, glued or stapled. Each book is dated and the series grows into a significant record of the class's writing progress — and a regular stimulus to every writer to keep on improving.
- *Book sale.* A powerful class activity — or, better still, school activity — is an end-of-term Book Sale. Everyone is an author and plans one or more books, then drafts, redrafts (several times), polishes, and then beautifully hand prints or writes the book, illustrates it, provides a splendid cover, puts a price on it and enters it in the sale, which has been well publicised throughout the local community. Profits to school funds — for purchase of writing materials and library books? Any unsold books can be block-purchased by the library so as to avoid hurt to the authors.
- *School magazine or paper.* Every school with an effective language policy should have one! It exhibits the best writing from every class. Teachers, always alert for eligible pieces, ask authors to turn promising efforts into 'publication quality' (fully corrected, neatly rewritten) and submit them to the Editorial Panel, a teacher and

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[1] Contributed by Margaret Culhane, Star of the Sea School, Watson's Bay, N.S.W.

Year 6 group. Not everything will be published, but even to be 'considered for publication' is an honour. When the magazine appears, every class uses it for reading, discussion and more writing.

- *A class paper.* Less elaborate than the school magazine, this paper must not present production difficulties. Here is one authentic example[2]:

  > 'The children had written by hand, using biros on ink stencils. Perhaps some had forgotten to insert the backing sheet or had simply not exerted enough pressure, with the result that on a number of pages the ink had not come through sufficiently . . . The student producers had laboriously gone over those pages in biro so that what was meant to be read could be read. Despite this, and indeed, in part because of this, it was obvious that the paper had been produced with tender loving care. There were small sketches of each member of the class and the warmth of the relationships which existed between members and with the teacher, was quite apparent.'

  In fact this describes the *Christmas Journal* of a Sydney school nearly 30 years ago. The spirit could hardly be bettered today but modern printing technology makes our production task easier and more effective.
- *Publishing Office.* The whole class or a group sets up as the office of a newspaper, magazine or book publisher. Personnel *may* be numerous: proprietor, managing editor and sub-editors, illustrators, production manager and assistants, feature writers, journalists, freelance contributors, advertising copy writers, sales promotion writers, accountant, invoice and despatch clerks, and perhaps others. Of course it is best to start small and grow, perhaps with an Editorial Office of three, which deals with any number of writers. Many schools have experimented with a Newspaper Editorial Office which plans and secures the writing of a newspaper.
- *Newspapers.* As part of media study, a class can work out the components of the modern dailies — features, fashions, ads, comics, sports, etc., *and* news reporting. All members of the class can be asked to volunteer to write part of a paper, which needs to have an agreed context, e.g. local news, or school news, or class news. Or perhaps produce a 'Good News Only' paper, or 'Australia Welcomes First Space Visitors', etc.
- *Posters.* Given a chance, children will keenly make posters about good or zany causes. The stress will be on brevity and dramatic impact, with a harmony of words and graphics. Why not keep a wall space available throughout the year for good poster creations?
- *Publication on school assembly.* Entirely special is the reading out of good writing on assembly — a means of demonstrating the high status of writing in the school. Occasional pieces can be accorded this honour, or well-written class reports, or collective literary creations.
- *Sending letters and cards.* For these easily handled but significant forms of publication, see p. 89.

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[2] J. M. Thomson, in *101 Questions Primary Teachers Ask* (P.E.T.A., Sydney, 1980), p. 114.

3. Within curriculum limits,[1] leaving scope for origination of topics

The two previous sections have been concerned with the 'personal' or 'experience' writing, for which the primary curriculum offers great scope. The first section looked at self-reliant origination of topics by the child, the second at ways the teacher can assist the child to originate topics.

But what about the 'subject areas'?[1] Must the child's 'ownership' of topics and writing end at the threshold of subject-oriented writing? Must curriculum prescription and teacher-direction become the order of the day? Definitely not. Primary curriculum provisions are mostly very general. They set only broad limits, and *within those limits there is room for a great deal of topic origination and ownership of writing by the child.*

Donald Graves, who has intensively researched the experience-writing of young schoolchildren and their ability to choose their own topics, says:

> When their confidence has risen through making many such choices in the area of experience-writing, they become fit to cope with the content subjects, where some prescription of subject matter is necessary. Even then, one hopes, a teacher will not impose a single topic but will rather allow a degree of choice within a broad frame; and the child will know how to work through various options, how to make one of them his topic, and how to limit that topic and set about note-making and writing.[2]

That statement can guide the long section that now follows: subject by subject we will look at representative activities that can lead to writing in which children have scope for originating, or partly originating, topics and subject-matter within broad curriculum-imposed or teacher-imposed limits.

(a) In English (or Language Arts)

Most primary teachers believe the central purpose of English as a subject is first to teach elementary literacy and thereafter to continually develop ability in reading and writing. Many also accept responsibility for developing children's oral language. Let us consider topics within English under the headings, Talking/Listening, Reading, and Writing. It will be proper in this book to go into greatest detail about Writing. It will also be convenient to make a separate section of Drama.

i. Talking/Listening

Where a curriculum requires the teaching of 'oracy', some teachers set up 'oral situations' — specific exercises such as using the telephone or asking and giving directions. No doubt there is some value in such exercises, but not much. More profitable would be an everyday flow of work-talk and discussions of real personal and social problems. From these sources would arise for the children insights worth recording in writing, and problems that need working out in writing.

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[1] The term 'curriculum limits' is used here to cover all 'subjects'. The old attempt to treat English and Art as 'contentless' and Science and Social Studies as 'content subjects' is untenable. English, for instance, has a considerable body of content (e.g. knowledge *about* language, composition and literature) and none of its activities can be without a content of meaning. As to Science and Social Studies, they are not simply aggregations of content in the sense of 'facts' but increasingly stress the importance of attitudes, procedures and processes — as does English.

[2] *Donald Graves in Australia*, ed. R.D. Walshe (Primary English Teaching Association, Sydney, 1981), p. 9.

Here is a brief range of talking/listening activities which are desirable in their own right but also likely to fulfil incidentally most of the 'oracy' requirements of a curriculum. Some are likely to lead to writing that will allow children scope for originating their own topics.

- *Work-talk in all subjects.* If classroom conditions are right — e.g. learning areas, group projects, genuine problems, an easy flow of teacher-child conversation, etc. — then talking-and-listening becomes an integral part of the ongoing learning process which will often also include some writing.
- *Conversations.* Talk is the most accessible, most abundant resource available to a teacher — not only 'teacher-talk' but, more importantly, the conversations in the classroom between teacher and child or group or class, and child and child. Out of such conversations on all manner of personal, social and cultural problems will arise insights for the children worth jotting into, say, a Journal or considering as the genesis of a writing topic.
- *Talk about language.* A continuing point of discussion for the class will be language itself in all its amusing, puzzling, surprising, illuminating aspects. Children easily find some of these aspects worth writing about.
- *News.* The 'news sessions' of the infants school deserves to be extended, with variations, into the primary years. With its strong elements of 'experience' and 'autobiography' it has great potential as a source of topics for writing.
- *Ethnicity.* Not just recent arrivals from abroad but *all* of us are 'ethnics'. What are the cultural gains to our country from historical and recent ethnic differences? What qualities and concerns do all peoples have in common?
- *Education.* The larger issues of education continually crop up in conversation: reasons for rules, routines, discipline; effects of the mass media; education for leisure as well as work; the knowledge explosion; etc. Children can easily find writing topics here.
- *Reading aloud.* Most teachers now accept the value of 'reading aloud to the class every day'. From this can regularly arise questions, conversations and ideas for writing. (While listening, children may 'doodle' as office-workers do, pencilling sketches, patterns, letters or words — activities which occupy fingers, help pen-control, and don't spoil listening.)

ii. Reading

Vastly important for the class's writing program is its reading program: 'The urge to write,' as novelist John Hersey[3] says, 'is the child of the love of reading'; and, as writing authority Mina Shaughnessy[4] adds, children's '. . . models for written language are probably absorbed through reading.' Yet with the best of intentions schools have often turned children off both reading and writing by imposing dull writing exercises about books. Hersey insists that whatever is done about reading

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[3] John Hersey, 'Partnership in Pleasure', in *Teaching Writing — Advice from Professionals* (Journal of Connecticut Council of T. of E.), Spring 1977.

[4] Mina P. Shaughnessy, 'Basic Writing' in *Teaching Composition: Ten Bibliographical Essays*, ed. Gary Tate (Texas Christian Uni. Press, Fort Worth, Texas, 1976).

> must be done with pleasure as its goal: the pleasure of creation that reading gives. From that pleasure, and only from it, can flow the even higher pleasure of creation that writing gives.

In relation, then, to possible 'writing about reading' the teacher needs to work out criteria such as these:

.. Above all I want my children to enjoy their reading.
.. I will not impose writing-about-reading that they may find irksome — certainly not book reviews, plot summaries or comprehension passages.
.. There is no *necessity* for primary children to write about their reading when a thousand other writing options may appeal to them more.
.. However, I believe their reading experiences are an important potential source of writing topics.
.. I will therefore encourage them, but not compel them, to find topics for writing in their reading, and will leave the choice to them.

Such encouragement could direct the children towards three kinds of writing:

- *Journal Entries.* The child makes any kind(s) of voluntary entry in a Journal or notebook — a comment on what has been read, the copying of an exciting passage, poem, etc.
- *Copying Passages.* While copying is properly frowned on as a writing activity, there is an important exception to the rule. When children themselves choose passages that have impressed them, and copy these carefully and lovingly, they benefit by thus meditating on prose, rhythm, structure, and flow of meaning. The practice deserves to be regularly promoted by the teacher. The children can also be encouraged to use their selections as models for writing original pieces, which are circulated for reading.

  A specially useful form of copying can be carried out at the K-2 stage: the children nominate a favourite story from the ones read aloud to the class; they then write or help to write the story on large sheets of paper, with illustrations, to create a 'big book' — an essential component of 'shared book experience'.[5]
- *Choosing from a Range of Options.* If the class has shared the reading of a book, the teacher can say, 'I want you all to write a piece about this book from whatever angle interests you most. When these pieces have been drafted and polished we will have a class sharing and this will bring out many surprising qualities of the book, a great variety of viewpoints. Here are some of the angles you might choose . . .

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[5] This idea is presented at length with many interesting examples by Libby Charnock in the July 1981 *Newsletter* of English Language Curriculum Services, Wattle Park Teachers Centre, Adelaide, SA.

.. tell what you like or dislike about one of the characters
.. offer opinions on the story-line or the setting
.. explain how this book (or a part of it) compares with another
.. rewrite part of the story as a news report
.. disagree with some part and give reasons
.. take the villain's side and present his (or her?) case
.. rewrite ending differently (sadly/outrageously/realistically/etc.)
.. argue that the heroes may not have lived 'happily ever after'
.. work out the basic plot and write a different story around it
.. write a different story around one of the characters
.. write a letter to the author, expressing your views.'

N.B. Any of these and any other options will also be open to a child who has read a book individually and elects to write something about it. Such a list of options might be displayed in the Writing Area.

iii. Drama

School drama is infinitely flexible and in many of its aspects may prompt children to write. But, like reading (see p. 72), it must above all be pleasurable. So we should be careful never to wring writing from dramatic activities, for then both drama and writing would be losers. Here are some suggestions for drama that might lead to cheerful writing.

- Some children enjoy writing and enacting their own short plays. All they need is the opportunity, together with some guidance on how to script a play. If a promise of performance in front of the class is added, the temptation can be irresistible.
- Plays can be short and simple. When children realise this they become willing to experiment creatively. The teacher can work at showing there is no wall between 'drama' and many of life's more graphic moments: any capturing of attention, any bright exchange, any conflict — perhaps even anything done with style. Think for example of how a dramatic element can easily infuse 'oral activities' such as:

    conversing
    explaining
    questioning
    greeting
    farewelling
    insisting
    threatening
    rejecting
    arguing
    debating
    defending
    criticising
    reporting
    interviewing
    joking
    announcing
    broadcasting
    compering
    public-speaking
    role playing

  Any of these activities might be 'pointed up' as mini-plays.
- Occasionally, improvisations can be so successful that children want to write them down as a permanent record. 'Improvisation' is dramatic invention without a script, the working up of a dramatic piece from an idea, a story, a poem, a sketchy plot, a problem — in fact any stimulus. The following well-conceived examples need only *minimum directions* from the teacher to get pairs or groups moving:

  .. Conduct a brother and sister argument.
  .. Explain to your parents how you got into a fight.
  .. A group catches a shoplifter and questions him or her.
  .. Parents discuss their troublesome son or daughter.
  .. A family of recent immigrants discuss Australians.

- Some teachers who have fully grasped the power of drama in classroom learning use it as a lead into integrated work across the curriculum. They might write a short play themselves — to focus on an area, raise problems, turn the abstract into the realistic. Or, better still, they develop a play from oral directions, with groups improvising and writing up parts of it, e.g. after reading about Captain Cook's landing at Botany Bay in 1770, six groups wrote and presented: On the *Endeavour*, sailing into the bay; In the longboat, rowing Cook to the shore; The clash with the two Aboriginals; What the landing party observed while looking for water; Raising the flag and speculating on the future of this land; What a group of Aboriginal men and women had to say as they watched the ship leaving. It was a splendid entry to a fortnight of integrated activities.
- Here is an inspired account of play-making from a teacher who values drama, enjoys its activity, doesn't find it burdensome, and sees writing as a frequent and voluntary part of the process.[6]

  > Either we make a play from a much loved story or poem or from an original stimulus — an object, toy, experience or just exciting words. I gather the children around me in a corner of an open acting space. Shoes and coats off! We talk. I question. An incident emerges. Then we talk up a story-line. Talk, talk, talk till the time is right for some brief mime or enactment.
  >
  > Changes to the story-line keep being devised. Good! Creativity is bubbling. I usually then divide the class into small groups to complete making the play. I allow each much latitude. The variations are most interesting when we come to classroom performance.
  >
  > The process can of course spread over two or more days. Usually it also extends into related activities such as writing and all sorts of art/craft work. Because TV conditioning of children's minds is so strong, I urge the value of original work at all stages — 'a play of our very own, that no one has ever seen or heard before.'

- The occasion of a class 'Drama Festival' can lead individuals and groups to write and perform a diversity of dramatic acts.

iv. Poetry — shapes and forms

Poetry comes in all shapes, sizes and flavours which children should be allowed to freely sample. Elsewhere we have discussed ways to encourage and help children write poems. Here we can limit ourselves to providing them with *structures* which will often succeed in stimulating them to create their own poems.

The following 'shapes and forms' of poetry put *form* ahead of *content* — but without wishing to imply that that is the proper order of things. Indeed, most poets would say that content — feeling, image, idea — usually comes first and that it chooses the form it needs. On the other hand, some eminent figures in English literature have worked happily in both directions. Shakespeare, for instance, seems mainly to have worked from content to form in writing his plays yet he wrote over 150 poems within a set form — the sonnet. He obviously thrilled to that form. Children too can be turned on by a form, especially if it is accompanied by an example. Here, then, from the host of poetic structures[1] available, is a comprehensive sampling of the simpler poetic forms that are within the range of primary children.

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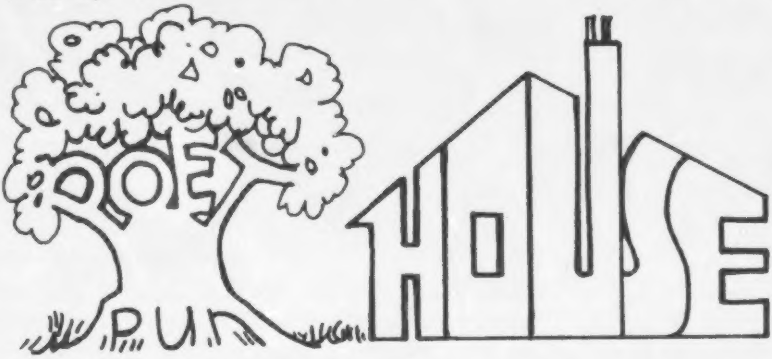
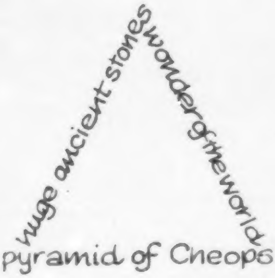
[6] For this and several other ideas in this section I am indebted to Barbara Fiala, Infants Mistress, Sylvania Heights Public School.

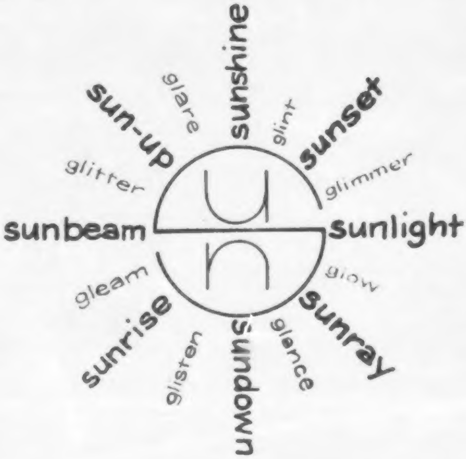
1. KEY-WORD 'POEMS'

Some key-word 'poems' play with a single word by looking like what the word says . . .


POET
P.U.n
HOUSE

Some use more than one word but give prominence to the shape of the thing referred to by the key word . . .


huge ancient stones
wonder of the world
pyramid of Cheops


sunshine
glare
glint
sun-up
sunset
glitter
glimmer
sunbeam
sun
sunlight
gleam
glow
sunrise
sunray
glisten
glance
sundown

Others build alliteration onto the key-word . . .

Skiers
Swish
Swooshingly

Mice
Munch
Methodically

Dancers
Drift
Dreamily

---

[1] Eve Babitz, the American writer, said somewhere, 'It's the frames which make some things important and some things forgotten. It's all only frames from which the content rises' — an extreme viewpoint, but interestingly expressed.

Acrostics are always popular . . .

Libby's mad
On
Victor who doesn't
Even know it.
Vivienne (11)

Boys . . .
Oh
Yuk!
So selfish
Deirdre (11)

Prejudiced
Racists
Everywhere
Justifying
Ugly
Discrimination
Inciting
Callous
Extremism
Julie Crough (16)

2. Shape Poems

Poems are meant to be seen as well as heard. A heavy-handed way of demonstrating this is to ask children to arrange the words or lines in the physical shape of the subject . . .

THE OLD OAK

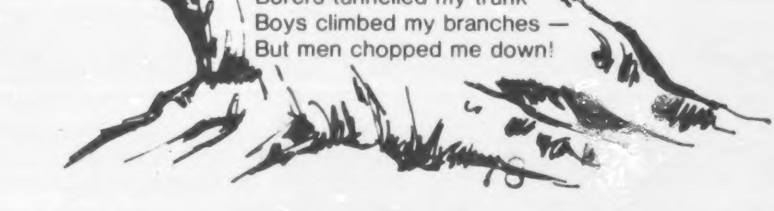
The chain-saws whirl
their endless drone being
suddenly cut short by a
sickening, deafening crash. The
oak lies on its side waiting to be
stripped of rotted leafless branches
that had served it for fifty
years or more.
The
old
oak
tree
is . . .
dead!
Barbara (11)

STARVED

Skinny
black
child
with
stick
arms
stick
legs
stick
ribs
you
spoil
my
dinner.

3. Poems within Shapes

These blend poetry and drawing . . .



OLD STUMP

Beautiful once!
Birds nested in me
Bees gathered my honey
Bugs nibbled my leaves
Borers tunnelled my trunk
Boys climbed my branches —
But men chopped me down!

4. SYLLABLE POEMS

This example gives a diamond pattern, but other patterns are possible.

Sh-h! (1)
No noise! (2)
Not a sound! (3)
Not one word, please! (4)
In this library (5)
Let's have only (4)
Reading and (3)
Silence (2)
Sh-h! (1)

Fit
Rugged
Muscular
Football hero . . .
What a rough, tough game!
Limping badly
Shoulder hurt
Beaten
Done

5. FORM POEMS

One form is 4/3/4/3 words per line, rhymed or unrhymed . . .

TV
Drama, news, variety, ads,
Quick, easy, appealing,
Glamour, violence, facts, fads,
Dreamy, tempting, time-stealing.

TRAFFIC LIGHTS
Orange . . . red . . . green — 'Start!'
Cars, trucks, bikes,
Rev, surge, pass, dart,
Orange . . . 'Stop! Lights!'

Why not experiment by diverging from the 4/3/4/3 pattern, e.g. . .

DOUGHNUT
Golden, round,
Sweet, scrumptious, satisfying.
Oh, the calories —
Forbidden fruit!

WEB
Structured, delicate,
Deceiving, luring, ensnaring
Unwary creatures.
Gossamer trap!

Joan Butler

6. COUPLETS

They can be rhymed or unrhymed . . .

White clouds piling high;
Whipped cream on a pie.

A teacher roaring at a child —
An eagle squawking at its prey.

Rosemary Loring (11)

Brian Powell calls this kind 'Dylan Thomas Portraits' . . .

Did you ever see a boy scout?
Wide-eyed, flat-footed, well-meaning, useless.

Andreas Furst (10)

Did you ever see a scrum?
Sure-footed, hard-hitting, back-breaking, robust.

Ian Corner-Walker (10)

Did you ever hear a brass band?
Oom-pah-pah-ing, base-drum thumping, trumpets toot-toot-tooting.

7. TRIPLETS

These are any 3-line poems, rhymed or unrhymed, whatever the length of the lines. Best known is a Japanese form, *haiku*, which is unrhymed, with five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, five in the third. Some Japanese writers have urged formal restraints, e.g. that the first two lines should present a vivid picture and the third express an insight or emotional exclamation. Westerners, inclined to observe only the single condition of the 5/7/5 pattern, are increasingly calling this form not *haiku* but 'seventeener' or 'five-seven-five'.

- Furu ike ya
  Kawazu tobikomu
  Mizu no oto

An old pond
A frog jumps in–
Sound of water.

Basho (1644-94)

STORM

Trees darken with rain
Horses huddle by hedges
And dogs bark with fright.

Michelle (11)

- Clouds streak along their
  fast-lane boulevards, thrusting
  ahead of the storm.

Laurel Dumbrell

- Off to the country
  to live a life of leisure –
  I can hardly wait!

Robert (16)

A variation is the 5-line *tanka*, which has 31 syllables in a pattern of 5/7/5/7/7.

8. QUATRAINS

A quatrain is any 4-line poem or stanza. It may have an ABAB or AABB rhyming pattern, or only the second and fourth lines may rhyme; indeed, children, D. H. Lawrence *et al.* have produced some concise and effective unrhymed 4-lines. A popular parody of a well-known poem goes:

UNLESS . . .

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree
In fact unless the billboards fall
I'll never see a tree at all.

CITY

Surfacing at last from the dim subway
To busy footpaths, glittering shops and car-jammed streets,
I'm whirled along by a chattering, sidestepping throng,
Dazed by all these bodies, shoes, shapes, lights, displays, noises.

Daniel (16)

9. CINQUAINS

By one prescription cinquains consist of five unrhymed iambic lines of 2/4/6/8/2 syllables, 22 in all. A gentler prescription is not strict about the syllables or the iambics and only asks that the first line supply a title, the second describe it, the third express an action, the fourth express a feeling, and the fifth repeat the title or give a synonym for it.

- The dusk
  brings out the frogs
  to mingle croaking with
  the shrill cicadas' throbbing song—
  what din!

- Prison . . .
  Drills and commands
  Work hard or be punished
  The time drags — will it never end?
  Schoolday!

10. SHORT POEMS

Having moved through syllable and word poems, couplets, triplets, quatrains and cinquains, we leave it to the teacher to move on upwards to the numberless forms, lyric or narrative, that fill the anthologies. For the classroom it is sufficient that we encourage children to write 'short poems', whether rhymed or free, and whether original creations or patterned on poems found in anthologies. One free verse example . . .

SAMU, THE CAT

Tiger-coiled — I spring;

or stalk . . .
with steady stealth of satin movement
upon precise paws;

or stretch . . .
with a deliberation of muscle
that is so delightful;

or yawn . . .
closing lids on unfathomable eyes
of yellow summer suns;

tiger-fanged . . . waiting.

Sue Nicholls

Let us now look at some short poetic forms not likely to be found in most anthologies . . .

11. PATTERNED PARTS-OF-SPEECH

(a)

noun	Noise
two adjectives	distracting, inescapable
three verbs	disturbs, irritates, angers
a phrase	curse of modern times
repeat noun (or use synonym)	jangling!

(b)

Write on separate lines a noun, verb and adjective each beginning with the same letter; they may be preceded or followed by two short lines of verse . . .

BLUE FIRE

Caught by the sunlight
Wet by the dew
  Forget-me-nots
  Flicker
  Faintly.

12. REPETITION FORMS (OR 'PARALLEL POEMS')

SILENCE
Silence is a glider, gracefully skimming the air-currents
Silence is the flame conquering the candle and subduing it to wax
Silence is the untouched glistening snow before the race is run
Silence is like a bird, sometimes here, sometimes gone.

Hamish Cooper (10)

— There are many possibilities, e.g. *'Soft as* a kitten, *soft* as . . .' etc.; or *'Red is . . .'* etc.; or *'Why do . . .'* etc.; or *'I love . . . I hate . . .'* etc.; or *'I remember . . .'* etc.

A refinement is a 'Walt Whitman Catalogue' as suggested by this model . . .

Good in all,
In the satisfaction and aplomb of animals
In the annual return of the seasons,
In the hilarity of youth
In the strength and flush of manhood,
In the grandeur and exquisiteness of old age,
In the superb vistas of death.

Walt Whitman, 'Song at Sunset' (1860)

Sometimes a conclusive line is added to sum up, e.g. Whitman might have added, 'Yes, good in all!' A comparable classroom example might be . . .

ME

What's it like being me?
I have hazel eyes and a large nose
I have straggly hair that swiftly grows [etc.]

An exacting variation is a 'Definition Poem'

DEFINITION POEM
Fun is ....
Sadness is ....
Play is ....
Work is ....
Order is ....
Disorder is .... [etc.]

13. PLAY RHYMES

Not 'nursery rhymes' (which adults invent and teach to children), play rhymes are probably mostly invented by children themselves — for skipping, hand-clapping, ball-bouncing, 'elastics', or choosing members of a team.

Cinderella, dressed in yella,
Went downstairs to meet her fella,
On the way her panties busted
How many people were disgusted?
One, two, three, four . . .

— from *Cinderella Dressed in Yella*
ed. Ian Turner (Heinemann, 1969)

14. AUTOGRAPH BOOK RHYMES

What shall I write?
What shall it be?
Two little words —
REMEMBER ME . . . [sgd.]

— from *Cinderella Dressed in Yella*
ed. Ian Turner (Heinemann, 1969)

15. FREE TRANSLATION POEMS

Give children a foreign language poem, read it aloud with them, but don't translate it. Let them puzzle over the words; then, full of ideas suggested by the words, they can write their own versions in English, following the form of the original, though by no means precisely. Here is a simple German poem as a starter; later models need not be as readily translatable into English . . .

KINDERREIM

Eins, zwei, drei,
alt ist nicht neu,
neu ist nicht alt,
warm ist nicht kalt,
kalt ist nicht warm,
reich ist nicht arm,
arm ist nicht reich,
und hart ist nicht weich.

16. NONSENSE VERSE

This can be all or mostly in non-words (like Lewis Carroll's 'Twas brillig . . .') or in words . . .

Gibbledy, gabbledy, gobbledygook
Grant is as mad as a headless chook
Harry's as crazy as all get out
Arthur is raging around and about
Stan is the stupidest kid in the land
Roy is a lunatic quite out of hand
But Alf is the one with the silliest look
Gibbledy, gabbledy, gobbledygook.

Of course there are degrees of 'nonsense', as we are reminded by this spooneresque and brilliant poem by Michael Doneman (11) . . .

CEMIXMENTER

As I watched the many morkwen
Shavelling gruvel and sand
Into the mate gronstrous cemixmenter
I wondered how much egerny
It took to shavel gruvel and sand
And how much cemix it mented
In a nortfight
Or a year.

I alwo sondered what do they do with cemixmenters
When they can o n'longer ment cemix?
They probably und ep on some old hubbish reap
In some old, old ancient yunkjard.

from *My Machine Makes Rainbows* (Reed)

17. LIMERICKS

This is a verse form with five lines and an AABBA rhyme scheme. Don't lightly ask children to write them, for they are a very exacting form. Experts have put out books full of brilliant ones, but you will probably be lucky to get something as awful as . . .

There was a young man named Steve
Who got married on Christmas eve
  His new wife, called Linda
  Burnt his socks to a cinder
That unhappy young man named Steve

18. INTERNAL RHYMES

Simply the use within a single line of two or more rhymes, this can be an occasional fun-piece; or the internal rhymes may occur in longer pieces . . .

- Rooty, tooty, I'm a beauty!
- TV — Love it, hate it, can't escape it!
- Strike a line through scrub or pine
  Stick a pig or porker
  Ride a hack or chase a black
  Ain't I a flamin' corker!

— Traditional

19. TONGUETWISTERS

- Peggy Babcock [repeat 6 times]
- Can you imagine an imaginary menagerie manager imagining managing an imaginary menagerie?
- Percy Panda panted pathetically past Peter Piper's peperoni pizza parlour.

Kerry (10)

20. ASSOCIATION POEMS

One thought leads to another — often with interesting results . . .

BOOMERANG
Toilets
Ladies and Gents
Segregation
White versus black
Defenceless skin
Winter nudist camps
Goosebumps, 'Blue Poles'
Government sponsored art
Art for art's sake
Have a 'eart!
Heart ache, tummy ache
Black, white, male, female
Common solace for all
Toilets

Grace Ross

v. Prose forms

The poetic shapes and forms are so various and entertaining that they often crowd out a proper attention to prose. Yet even the shortest prose form, *the sentence,* offers infinite possibilities and there is no end to what can be done with all the more complex prose forms. Many of the following activities will be found interesting by primary children who can, in most instances, provide their own ideas to fill the given structures.

1. COLLECT EXAMPLES OF 'GOOD SENTENCES'

Precisely how to achieve an understanding of sentence structure is one of the key issues in English teaching today. The old grammar did not achieve it; the new grammars have not proved more successful. The best results are coming from plenty of well-motivated, polished writing-for-an-audience. And the results are all the better when the teacher demonstratively shows an interest in sentences, continually holding up good examples from the children's writing and from literature, *and asks the children to collect and record examples that appeal to them* (perhaps in a special place in their Journals).

What is a sentence? Though every grammar book and dictionary tries to define a *sentence,* no definition has succeeded in covering helpfully all the possible kinds of sentence. Teachers, trying to stem the flood of run-on and verbless sentences, usually resort to simple definitions like, 'A group of words that makes sense on its own,' or '. . . expresses a complete thought,' or '. . . has a subject-and-verb structure'. But life is less simple than it once was: our children every day read ads that are packed with verbless sentences, and they read authors who write run-on sentences as a modern style device. Oh, but children must be aware, must be conscious, if *they* are going to bend 'the rules', say the purists. Surely, though, that is an all too easy counsel of perfection and implies that the learning of a rule like 'Every sentence must have a finite verb' should do the trick. Much more, however, is needed, including a 'sentence sense' that comes from a combination of reading, writing and *conscious attention* to sentences like these . . .

- A catfish has a mouth like a big smile.
  Charlotte (4)
- Lonely feels like sitting in a dark room all by yourself.
  Otis (6)
- Thunder! reminds me of Jack and the beanstalk as the giant tumbles to the ground.
  Gyula (9)
- The wind whistled happily down the street, ran into the park and played with the swings.
  Jocelyn Horsfall (11)

. . . they are fairly simple sentence structures and they only become outstanding because of specific language and imaginative pictures. More elaborate structures sometimes appear in upper primary writings and in the secondary school . . .

- There lies Jemima, her dark hair spread out on her pillow, dreaming about herself, the plain thirteen-year-old, working at school for an exam which had recently been a worry to her . . .
  Nichola Western (10)
- I pencil in the syllables, sounding them in my mind, but the hard ones I mutter aloud, and the family shake their heads sadly and say, 'Studying too hard — going crackers — won't last the course'.
  Kerrie Shaw (15)

2. POLISH SINGLE SENTENCES

The modern notion, 'small is beautiful', has relevance for writing. Instead of always working on whole compositions, why not sometimes ask children to choose one or two of their longer sentences from past drafts and polish them intensively? Or make use of typically loose spoken sentences by turning them into a concise written form, e.g.

Spoken: 'I think we're spoilt compared to the Chinese — you know, we've only got to learn 26 letters in our alphabet — and how would we get on if we had to learn all those thousands of characters like the Chinese do?'

Written: With only 26 letters in our alphabet, we are spoilt as compared to the Chinese, who have to learn thousands of characters. (Many versions are possible.)

3. IMITATE GOOD SENTENCES

Direction: Follow approximately the structure of this sample sentence and write a sentence of your own about a different subject . . .

Sample: 'The wild things roared their terrible roars, gnashed their terrible teeth, rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws.' (Maurice Sendak)

Another Sample: 'And behind the bar stood Mr Boothby, six feet tall, portly, his stomach protruding, his back straight as a wall, his heavy face with its network of liquor-swollen veins dominated by a pair of cool, shrewd, prominent eyes.' (Doris Lessing)

4. Rewrite Ads in Full Sentences

Face up to the fact that a great deal of advertising is written in verbless sentences. Explain that advertisers do this in a bid to capture attention and persuade with breathless conviction. Then show how inappropriate this language would be in books and articles.

Ask the children to collect such ads, then rewrite them, noting as they do so the insertion of subject and/or verb.

Direction: Rewrite the following advertisement in complete sentences as if it were to take its place as a paragraph in a story.

Sample: 'Good One' . . . Nature's choice! The health drink for the whole family. Pure dairy milk with malt and honey. Satisfying. In the handy carton. Cheap too.

5. Expand Sentences ('sentence expansions')

Provide a sentence base and ask the children to generate their own words, phrases and clauses to add to it. Much of the skill of writing lies in using such expansions as economical means of enriching the texture of sentences. To avoid the lazy supplying of only single-word additions, the teacher may say, 'Add at least a dozen (or whatever) words to this sentence'.

Direction: Expand the following sentence by adding words, phrases or clauses in the positions indicated . . .

Sample: ‸ Joan Sutherland ‸ will open ‸ the concert ‸

6. Combine Sentences ('sentence combining')

This exercise became widespread in the United States in the 1970s. Strong claims have been made for it, though there are critics who attack its formality and the triviality of many of the sentences used. Certainly, it is highly prescriptive: the child has no choice but to take the given sentences and combine them.

Direction: Here are a number of short sentences. Combine them to make a smooth single sentence.

Example: John set out on a trip. (ING)
John waved goodbye to his mother.
John loves cycling. (WHO)

— Setting out on a trip, John, who loves cycling, waved goodbye to his mother.

This example uses bracketed direction 'cues'; other examples may be left 'open'. There is seldom a single correct answer. As the children listen to a variety of possibilities, they realise how flexible sentences can be. (The example presents only one of many possible formats for sentence combining.)

Another Example: There were bushfires.
They were the worst in years.
They prevented him leaving for work.

— Bushfires which were the worst in years prevented him from leaving for work. [Many versions are possible.]

7. Experiment with Cumulative Sentences

A special sentence worthy of imitation and variation by good writers in upper grades is the one that the American teacher of writing, Francis Christensen, called the *cumulative sentence.* After children imitate a few, they can become fascinated in creating others, especially if they set them out on a page to look like a poem. Examples of such sentences are not hard to find in good modern novels. They take the form of a main statement, usually at the beginning, followed by additions which fill in for the reader the details, qualities or comparisons necessary for good explanation. Here are three examples set out in 'poetic' form . . .

- He would read anything,
  fiction or non-fiction,
    so eager was he to learn more and more.
- She came up behind him,
  full of mischief,
    tip-toeing in rubber-soled shoes,
      holding a pin between thumb and forefinger.
- A cumulative sentence begins with a main statement,
  its general proposition,
    which it follows with details or qualities,
      these filling out a picture for the reader.

Here is an elaborately sustained example written by a secondary class with the teacher's help (its added principal end-clause makes it less than perfectly 'cumulative'):

INSPIRATION
Teacher has told me to write a poem
  about real experience,
  perhaps my vividest moment,
    starting with a gripping 'lead',
    connecting all ideas carefully,
      avoiding generalities
      by using specific images,
        each word to be weighed,
        each phrase to be polished —
and to get it in without fail TOMORROW!

The idea that one sentence — even a short sentence — can make a poem is not new. The most famous in this genre is William Carlos Williams' 'The Red Wheelbarrow' (1951), which is in many recent anthologies. No ordinary sentence will do; the words need to be strong with meaning to justify giving stanza status to its phrases . . .

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Setting out on spring
mornings

I cannot bear
to tread

the dew-laden
grasses

glistening in the
dawnlight.

8. COPY WELL-WRITTEN PARAGRAPHS (OR PASSAGES)
This suggestion may seem to smack of the old discredited 'rote-learning'. On the contrary, it can play a valuable role in sensitising children to good prose. Several eminent teachers of writing advocate it strongly, for example Barrett J. Mandel, who says that it '. . . allows the student's whole organism to have the experience of producing mature prose . . . allows the student a first-hand encounter with mature sentences, full-bodied paragraphs, and subtle rhythms. No amount of detached classroom talk about *unity* and *emphasis* can possibly work as well' *(College Composition and Communication,* N.C.T.E., December, 1980, p. 376). Mandel suggests that the model passages should be 'selected by the student on the basis of taste and appreciation.'

9. 'READ THEN WRITE – TO SEE IF YOU CAN!'
Several good writers report having done this exercise with great profit in their apprentice years: 'Choose from your reading a fine paragraph or passage; read it several times; then close the book and see if you can write it from memory. When finished, compare your version with that of the original.' The aim is not to reproduce the passage word-perfectly but to try to grasp its structure and style and do nearly as well as the author. Much will be learnt by thus fumbling with sentences and connections and then looking up the way the author did it.

10. IMITATE GOOD PARAGRAPHS
As for sentences in (3) above, choose fine paragraphs from reading, then write a similarly structured paragraph on a subject of one's own choosing.

11. WRITE AND POLISH A PARAGRAPH
As for sentences in (2) above, write a paragraph (or choose one from an existing draft) and polish it intensively. A specially valuable 'snapshot' form of short paragraph is the kind that Ken Macrorie calls 'Fabulous Realities' — vivid scenes from life, with a dramatic twist. (A single sentence can do, but more are often needed.) Here is an example written by a teacher . . .

> When the inspector asked our infants class, 'Now, children, what is RELIGION?' there were several answers, none of which seemed to satisfy. Then little blue-eyed Jennie raised a hesitant hand: 'Please, miss, it's what my mummy and daddy and me do on Sunday mornings.'

12. USE ANY PROSE FORM CONGENIAL TO YOU
Beyond the sentence and paragraph forms discussed above, children should be allowed a good deal of freedom in choosing a form from 'The many forms of prose writing' listed below. It is a long list, though by no means exhaustive. Perhaps a selection from it could hang as a chart in the classroom Writing Area:

THE MANY FORMS OF PROSE WRITING

All these forms are available for classroom writing . . .

MISCELLANEOUS
Free writing; stream-of-consciousness
Journal/Diary/Logbook
Autobiography
Letters: personal, business, to-the-editor
Story, anecdote, reminiscence, yarn, tale, tall tale
Historical fiction
Myth, legend, fable, folk tale, fairy tale
Fantasy, space fiction, futurism
Character sketch, biography
Interview, real or imagined
Joke, riddle, pun

LITERARY
Novel, novelette, short story
Play, dialogue
Essay, article
Book review, criticism
Prayer, parable, proverb
Scripts for TV, radio, film

MASS MEDIA (writing about or for)
Newspapers
Magazines
Paperbacks
Comics
Radio, records, tapes, cassettes
Film, photographs (inc. captions)
Television

COMMON FORMS
Signs, notices, labels, posters
Announcements
Telegrams
Filling in of forms
Letters of all kinds
Cards of all kinds
Invitations, replies
Reports
Petitions
Questionnaires
Surveys
Mnemonics
T-shirt insignias
Bumper stickers

ADVERTISING
Copy, in diverse forms, for use
in any of the media

vi. Letters[1] and cards

The pop star Stevie Wonder says: 'I feel that next to being actually physically touched by someone, reading a letter is the most personal and intense form of communication that there is.'[2]

Of course we only receive such personal letters if we also write them. Fortunately the writing can be as pleasurable as the receiving. Letter-writing is an important writing activity for schoolchildren because it is a kind that solves at one blow those troublesome writing problems — motivation, thinking of something to say, and finding real readers to write for.

The school needs to teach children the main *formats* of letter-writing (especially personal and business) but it can confidently leave the *who-to, where* and *what* of most letters to the children. They may only need reminding to use a clear, direct style, to retain a copy of all but personal letters, to keep a correspondence file, and to send a stamped addressed envelope with requests for information.

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[1] Letters are here discussed under 'English', but they have obvious relevance also in other subjects.

[2] Quoted in *All About Letters*, publication of U.S. Postal Service in cooperation with the National Council of Teachers of English, 1979 (64 pages).

Here is a classification of the main areas of letter-writing (followed by a note on cards).

(1) *Notes.* In a sense, the most basic letter is the scribbled note. It can be a 'letter' to oneself — a list or a jotted reminder. Or we may leave notes for members of the family, for neighbours, for tradespeople. Why not go beyond functional notes to the family by writing opinions, criticisms, loving thoughts, etc. — and 'planting' them in surprise places!

(2) *Notes for the teacher.* We usually say, 'Bring a note from your parents if you are . . .' — late, or whatever. Some parents ask the child to write it and Mum or Dad signs it. Good practice for the child!

(3) *Notes passed in class.* Instead of banning this ancient pastime, why not sanction it, encourage it, even provide a Mail Box which is cleared every morning? As well as the children writing to one another, invite them to write to you. If you can't cope with the rush, appoint a secretariat of, say, three fluent young writers, indicate to them orally what you wish to reply, leave the writing to them, simply check it for correctness, then sign.

(4) *Telegrams.* These too are a special kind of letter. The Post Office makes forms freely available, so make use of them for practice by the class. Either allow free choice of both the addressee and the message or provide the addressee and a broad topic but allow each child to devise the message. Stress the high cost of every word and ask writing partners to check each other's message scrupulously for unnecessary words.

(5) *Personal letters of all sorts.* Most important of all are personal letters — to friends, relatives, parents. Or to distant 'penfriends'. There are also the personal letters written for specific purposes: to send or respond to an invitation, to say thank-you for a gift or service, to congratulate, to express sympathy, and so on. (Cards may be used on occasion, but a personal letter adds the implication that the writer cares sufficiently to commit time and thought to the writing.)

(6) *Letters to the media.* To help overcome passivity in viewing, listening and reading, children can write to the media — criticising, applauding, asking for repeats or for 'more of the same'. There is also the 'fan letter' which TV channels, film studios and radio stations will deliver to their stars. And publishers will forward letters to their authors. By no means least, there are letters to the press, in particular letters of opinion addressed to the editor — preferably short sharp comments to local papers on local issues.

(7) *Protest and complaint letters.* Integral to Social Studies with its stress on the democratic responsibility of a good citizen is the letter of protest or complaint — in the interests of upholding standards and improving the quality of life. In this spirit letters can be written to local government bodies, to state and federal MPs, and to consumer and conservation 'watchdog' organisations, drawing attention to specific cases of neglect, abuse or injustice.

(8) *Letters requesting information.* Enormous scope exists for requesting information by letter. Whenever the school or local library fails to provide required information, children can be advised to (a) make inquiries about a possible source, (b) find the address, (c) write the letter. Here is a short list, devised by a Year 6 class, of subjects on which the children felt they might at some time need to write away for information:

Art
Astronomy
Authors
Bird-watching
Careers
Cars
Commercial products
Commonwealth Govt
Conservation
Consumer information
Cooking
Crafts
Diet
Education
Energy-saving
First aid
Genealogy
Gardening
Health
History
Indoor plants
Local Govt
Metrics
Museums
Music
National Parks
Nutrition
Pet-raising
Recreation
'Save the Seals'
Sexism
Space-age facts
Sports
Stamp-collecting
State Govt
Tourism
Trade unionism
Vanishing species
Whales

(9) *Business letters.* An order, a request for a catalogue, an ad for insertion in a newspaper, a claim for replacement of a defective product, a job application — these and a hundred other subjects fall within the broad classification of a business letter.

Note on Cards. Children enjoy making, wording, and illustrating their own cards for family and friends. Try to wean them from stock wordings. Say, 'Make it personal and original!' In one class every child produced a card for a classmate in hospital; each child thought of something individually interesting and each included 'something to make you smile'.

(b) In Social Studies

Children easily originate topics for writing at the personal level, but can we expect them to do so as they move into the less personal subject areas of the curriculum — indeed, should we allow them to do so?

The answer to this very basic question had better be made in relation to Social Studies because, by definition, it is the subject which proposes to turn the naturally egocentric child outward, from intensely personal concerns to the exploration of the whole wide world. What is true for Social Studies will apply broadly to other subjects across the primary curriculum.

The impulse of an academic mind is to feel that that outward-turning by the child should be sequenced as *steps,* with the *content* of each step prescribed. That would of course leave no room for origination of topics by the children. But fortunately the dream of a sequenced, prescribed content for Social Studies is at odds with the reality that the potential content of this subject is so overwhelmingly vast as to defy, say, neat parcelling as chapters of a textbook.

The content of Social Studies is nothing less than the entire human occupation of Earth, present and past. Everything we humans do or have ever done has a Social Studies orientation. So every teacher faces an acute selection problem: What criteria can guide me as I guide my children to at least some vantage points from which they will gain memorable glimpses of the incredible human panorama of events, societies, peoples, cultures, governments?

Here are four basic criteria that promise to guide the choice and handling of Social Studies content/concepts: (i) begin where the child's knowledge and interests are; (ii) look for content areas and major concepts that will not only be culturally significant but interesting to the child; (iii) embrace current experiences, or provide new ones, which bridge from the child's interests to the selected content areas; (iv) use interesting methods (including writing originated by the child) which develop the child's powers of investigation, self-expression and communication.

(i) *Beginning Where the Child Is.* The earliest focus of a Social Studies course is 'me'—the child as a unique and worthy individual:

What is special about me?
How do I express myself?
What are my favourite things? etc.

But the Social Studies perspective is that every 'me', however individual, moves in a web of relationships. No one can be completely a loner nor even a Robinson Crusoe (only social knowledge and artefacts enabled him to survive on his island). The teacher directs attention to relationships, widening the child's focus to:

How does my family relate to other families?
Where does my food come from?
Who were my ancestors? etc.

Primary school children relish opportunities to inquire, observe, talk, read and write as they pursue an expanding vision of the world. Their Social Studies needs to be strongly 'experience-based, language-soaked, activity-oriented'. In spite of their allegedly extreme 'egocentrism' — or perhaps, as some would argue, because of it — they strike out boldly to explore the wider world whenever we give them the opportunity.[3]

(ii) *Finding Interesting and Significant Content Areas.* It can be convincingly argued that 'significance' is to be found in every area of society: people *plus* relationships *equal* human significance. People anywhere! Which suggests that one content area is as good as another; the more so because any large social event or period is likely to be a microcosm of 'the human condition' within which most of the important social 'concepts' can be found. But if this seems altogether too undiscriminating, then the teacher might turn for balanced guidance to the following checklist, based on recommendations of the 'Core Curriculum for Australian Schools' (C.D.C., Canberra, 1980):

- Focus: *How do people participate effectively in society?* Areas worth considering may include:
  - .. major political, social and cultural institutions and processes of Australia as a democratic and economically advanced society;

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[3] Long overdue are the telling arguments marshalled by Margaret Donaldson against Piaget's case for the extreme egocentrism of young children (in her *Children's Minds*, Fontana 1978, esp. Chapter 2).

- the place and significance of belief and value systems (religion, ideology) in our society;
- diverse subcultures and common cultures within Australia (including ethnic and Aboriginal subcultures), and other societies;
- ideas of an international or world order;
- historical dimensions of all the above (social, political, economic history);
- contemporary and future dimensions of all the above (social issues and trends, the law, consumerism, social values, etc.).

A worthy but very general list! At least it confirms that the teacher's scope for selection is enormous; so much so, indeed, as to show that the question, 'What will interest the child?' should generally take precedence over agonising about 'significance'. And the question can only be answered by the individual teacher and his or her children on the basis of their existing interests, knowledge and resources (helped by school and regional resources). For example, it is perfectly legitimate for a course to be strongly influenced by a teacher's special enthusiasm for any of these: World History, Australian History, Asian History, Cultural History, Human Geography, Environmental Studies, Social Science, or Current Affairs. Such a course can brim with fascination for the children.

Crucial to maintaining interest throughout a unit is the answer we make to what is an old content-problem for historians: 'Shall I feature the particular or general, the concrete or abstract, the individual or mass?' In a famous essay the historian Jan Huizinga (1872-1945) said: 'The historical observer never confronts a bare and simple fact unrelated to a broader general context . . . but by reason of its natural bent, historical sense always inclines toward the particular, the graphic, the concrete, the unique, the individual.'[4] Surely this emphasis needs to be made even more strongly for the primary child! In fact the teacher is well advised to try to see that every Social Studies unit offers children not only concreteness but the kind of *narrative element* that History offers in abundance.

(iii) *Finding Experiences That Bridge from the Child's Interests to the Selected Content Area.* No one disputes that Social Studies units should be strongly experience-based, yet they often aren't, either because the nature of 'experience' is narrowly understood or because near-at-hand opportunities for experiences are overlooked.

Experiences can as well be brief as lengthy, simple as profound, vicarious as first-hand. Their characteristic quality is a felt sense of wholeness, of something begun, lived with and completed, leaving an impression more or less strong of meaningfulness or significance. Potentially, an infinite variety of experiences is available: an event, excursion, discussion, problem, protest, dream, interview, game, drama, poem, book, visitor, TV program, etc. But, we must self-critically ask, 'Was it really an experience *for the child?*' Or was it only something that happened, only humdrum school-stuff — a non-experience? Teachers can't *prescribe* experiences; they can only embrace or provide activities that they hope will appeal.

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[4] 'Historical Conceptualisation,' in *The Varieties of History*, ed. Fritz Stern (Meridian Books, N.Y., 1958), pp. 291, 297.

Major experiences have their place, but for every one of them there need to be dozens of simpler everyday experiences. An all-day excursion involving travel is a feat of organisation that can't happen often, but every day there can be a relatively effortless 'mini-excursion' to places within the school or only a short distance from it: to confer with another class, to scrutinise passing traffic, to deduce local government services by observation around the streets, to inquire about special services at the post office, to notice business operations in the shopping centre, to have an elderly citizen point out places of historic interest, and so on.

Simpler still, the children can frequently be taken to the school or local library to find information on the selected content area. Individuals can be asked to give reports or 'lectures' which trigger questions, discussions, plans for further inquiry. Perennially there are the *relationships* of classroom, school and family from which, as conflicts or problems arise, projections can be made outward to the wider society; for instance, the key problem of relationship, 'Cooperation or competition?', repays periodic consideration, with projections being made from classroom issues like 'Should pupils help one another or only compete?' to national and international issues as large as conservation and space exploration, crime and war.

(iv) *Finding Interesting Methods, including Writing.* Our discussion so far has established that the primary teacher (or school) enjoys the widest conceivable discretionary power in selecting interesting *content* and providing interesting *experiences* in the Social Studies course. A teacher who wishes then to encourage self-motivation as the best spur to learning, will not *impose* the activities of the next unit but will *negotiate* them with each child, including the writing that will be done.

Let us now return to the question with which this chapter began: How much of the writing in Social Studies can be originated and 'owned' by the child? Clearly, a very great deal. The curriculum and the teacher have only designated a potentially interesting content area and certain concepts; within these wide limits the child can now be sent to explore, and to find activities and writing topics. From this point, the child proceeds to use whatever kinds of writing are appropriate to the ensuing activities of investigation, self-expression and communication — to originate topics, or be helped by the teacher to find them, and to 'own' the writing that results.

Note. Social Studies may be taught as a separate unit or as a strand in an integrated unit. Consideration is given on page 112 to 'A Format for Planning of an Integrated Unit', with due attention to the place of writing in it.

(c) In Media[1] Study

The term 'media study' is common to a number of curriculums. Worthy and dull, it is sometimes interpreted narrowly as a directive to study the history and the technicalities of the principal media. But surely the main 'study' should be of the *current content* of the media. After all, in the case of TV it is last night's programs that are the main concern of the children in the classroom this morning.

Every teacher needs a clearly thought-out policy towards TV. See whether you agree with this one . . . Even school beginners, five year olds, have years of viewing experience behind them — years in which TV has been their 'third parent' and their 'first teacher'. With so much experience, children potentially have a great deal to express in talk and writing about this medium. BUT thousands of hours of television watching have bred addiction and passivity in them: addiction indicated by turning on the set without looking up the program; passivity indicated by slipping the brain into uncritical neutral. The Box has beamed a years-long one-way monologue at these silent children, often with stupefying effects. There has been none of the interaction — receiving *and* giving — that normal language development requires. We can't expect to overcome this passivity easily; but the key to doing so is to start working from the keenest TV interests of each child, encouraging talking-and-writing in that area. So we mustn't approach TV by condemning it; rather we must see that it is a communication medium with positive as well as the obvious negative features, and that every child must be set on the path of developing a balanced attitude to its use along with other media.

Why not begin from a reality we know — that children like to recount orally the highlights of their recent TV experiences? But what they say is usually brief and scrappy. We must encourage them to write, knowing that this — the act of writing — will prompt a deeper thinking. Then they will be on the way to achieving two great purposes: first, to rise above passivity through considered self-expression; second, to become discriminating and critical viewers — a faculty that of course can't be fully attained in the primary school.

Here are two sets of suggestions for writing about TV: (A) writing about TV as a medium; (B) writing about current programs. It is the second that should be given most time — by far!

(A) *Writing about TV as a medium*

(1) *A Survey.* Conduct a survey of the class's viewing habits. Prepare for it by asking every child to keep a TV Diary or Log for a week, stating the number of hours watched each day, identifying the name and type of each program, awarding a rating (e.g. very poor, poor, fair, good, very good) and making a brief comment summing up the viewer's feelings about each show. The 'type' might be: documentary, comedy (family), comedy (other), animal, cartoon, crime, western, movie, news, quiz, game, sport, or variety shows. From the results of the survey each child can write up a report or article.

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[1] Restricted space confines this discussion of 'the media' to the most influential medium for primary children, television. The principles underlying the discussion will be seen to apply more or less to other media — film, radio, newspapers, magazines, comics, paperbacks, records, cassettes and advertising.

(2) *Balance in Viewing.* During discussion of the survey, the issue of 'balanced viewing' is likely to arise. Children readily accept that a balance of shows is desirable. Ask each child to accept appointment as General Manager of Channel X, with responsibility for presenting a balanced offering. Each child can then work up a Policy Statement for the Channel together with a specific sample, say, Monday's programs. (N.B. There is also a larger balance — of TV-in-general in relation to all other activities.)

(3) *'Rules for Viewing'.* How many homes have rules regulating viewing? Some years ago the Broadcasting Control Board found that only 38% had rules governing *what* the children could view, and only 50% restricted the *time* they spent viewing. After discussing the need of every home to have rules, ask each child to adopt the parent role and write 'Rules for Viewing' to suit specifically his or her home.

(4) *'TV in My Life'.* Ask each child to make notes in answer to the following questions, then polish and rewrite for a group or class sharing: Where is the TV set in your home? Do you watch it alone or with others of the family? Do you eat while watching? How long do you watch on an average weekday? How long at weekends? Are you always interested or sometimes bored? . . . (Many other questions are possible, but ask the children to volunteer them, e.g. Does my mind wander while viewing? Do I feel I should be reading more, doing craft things, playing outdoors? Am I an addict? etc.)

(5) *'A Different Opinion'.* Emphasise the value of listening to other people's opinions. Find a family that doesn't have TV. Interview the parents and write up their opinions. Especially, what do they do while other people are viewing? and is life without TV boring?

(6) *Individual Reports.* Set great store on individual and voluntary writing about aspects of television. Invite the children to make reports to the class. In this way, for example, the history and the technological sides of television are likely to be covered quite adequately.

(B) Writing about TV programs

(7) What is the best TV show you have ever seen? Give an outline of what happened and say what you particularly liked. (Or write about your favourite series.)

(8) Write about any good (or poor) recent program.

(9) Do you like a program that not many of your classmates watch? Can you tell your reasons for liking it?

(10) Let's all watch a selected show, write an account of it, then compare what we have written.

(11) Write short answers to questions, such as the following about a 'family show':

- Name 4-5 of the main characters. After each name write a sentence or two about the kind of person he or she is.
- Are they rich or poor? Do you live in a house like theirs?
- What kinds of problems do they face? Are the problems similar to those of your family?
- What are the important things in life (values) for this family? Are there any things you are never told about them that you would like to know?

(12) Think up a story similar to a favourite one you have seen on TV, then write it up as a TV script.

(13) Write TV ads — to sell a real or imagined product, to advocate a good cause (e.g. anti-smoking, save endangered species, stop pollution), or to parody (i.e. 'send up') TV advertising.

(14) Make regular comments about TV in your Journal.

(d) In Science

Writing is an integral part of all stages of the scientific process. Its contribution to the process goes deeper than simple 'recording', for it also focuses and clarifies thought, it leads to useful linkages of ideas, it helps to generate new insights, and it is the only means we have for sequencing an account of the given scientific inquiry and publishing it for the enlightenment of others. Without writing, there can be no science.

'*Why do so many primary teachers doubt their ability to teach science?* Mainly, perhaps, because they believe primary science is much the same as the science taught in secondary schools by specialist teachers; also, perhaps, because they believe science is a difficult, answer-supplying subject and they don't know the answers. But these are misconceptions. Primary science is a non-specialist part of the curriculum, a problem-raising, grappling-with-problems activity. Once this is realised, the primary teacher sees that he or she can handle science just as well as any other part of the curriculum — and that science is invaluable for developing children's ability to inquire, and to use language accurately.'[1]

Modern primary curriculums increasingly stress the non-specialist character of the science strand. '*Science K-6* places emphasis on the process of personal exploration and self expression,' says the most recent and probably most elaborate curriculum published by a State department of education.[2] Non-specialist science is good news for the primary teacher and the primary child for many reasons:

- 'Science' here means, simply, investigating *any* part of the environment.
- Systematic teaching of science can be left to the secondary school.
- A textbook is not needed to guide the work.
- Sophisticated equipment is not needed.
- Any situation that puzzles a child has potential for inquiry.
- Everyday occurrences provide excellent starting points.
- Teachers don't need to instruct children in a body of 'science' knowledge.
- If the teacher doesn't know the answer to a problem, a child who wishes to investigate it need not be held back but can be encouraged to go ahead, enjoying the teacher's full support and interest.
- Work in the scientific spirit can easily be integrated with other strands of the curriculum, e.g. because it stresses use of all the senses and all four language modes.

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[1] *P.E.N. 8*, 'Language Learning While Learning Science', by Judy Turner, Trevor Kruger and R. D. Walshe (P.E.T.A., Sydney, 1978).

[2] *Science K-6*, 'Inquiry Skills', p. 6. This is the 1980 Curriculum Policy Statement of the N.S.W. Department of Education, Sydney.

- In a sense, one problem is as worthy as another, for it is a microcosm of all problems and (1) involves the child in the *process* of scientific inquiry, (2) leads the child into observant engagement with the physical, natural or human environments.
- *In short, most topics can be originated by the child, and most of the ensuing process of inquiry can be 'owned' by the child, as can most of the writing, which is integral to the process.*

The teacher's positive role is to release children's curiosity, draw attention to problems, intensify interest by questioning, and provide opportunities to pursue investigations. Dr Grahame Webb, Australia's leading researcher of crocodiles in the wild, says: 'The life-blood of science is the excitement of discovery — if that can be got across to students then learning becomes easy.'[3]

Without writing, science would today still be stuck at the stage reached by scientific thought prior to the invention of writing — the New Stone Age. In the 20th century there is no science in any meaningful sense without a process of research that includes writing out an exact question, drafting a research program, and then interspersing activities with jottings, rough-drafting, revising, polishing, revising again in the light of (perhaps written) criticism, and finally rewriting for publication. This being so for adult science, what kinds of writing may we look for from primary schools? To answer, we must look at each stage of an elementary scientific inquiry-process.

(1) *Writing to clarify the problem.* Overcome vagueness by precisely expressing a 'felt' problem: a clear question is first step to an answer.

(2) *Writing to decide what to do.* As well as discussion, brainstorm the possibilities by jotting down ideas, reading them over, and selecting a plan of action.

(3) *Writing while exploring the problem.* Jot down observations, insights, tentative solutions (hypotheses). Periodically read these over and add the new insights that often accompany or follow a reading.

(4) *Writing up the testing of hypotheses.* As major 'answers' emerge, subject them to rigorous criticism or tests and record the results.

(5) *Writing up the position reached.* Draft a statement of results, explaining how success was achieved or why further work needs to be done — a first draft.

(6) *Writing to publish the results.* Some research reports may be left in first draft; others, considered important, will be revised, rewritten and 'published' for the information of interested persons.

What this possible sequence shows is that nearly all of the writing can be informal, original, expressive, unpolished — and certainly unmarked. Only at the final stage, when a form of publication has been decided, will there be revision, rewriting, careful proofreading for correctness, and then perhaps 'publishing' in an attractive form as a report or book for the benefit of the classroom 'science community'.

Three Further Thoughts on Writing in Science

(i) *Two vehicles needed for two kinds of writing.* Here is a useful distinction: (a) *'Writer-based writing'*, which is all the writing that takes place up to and including the first draft; it is writing needed by the writer for the purpose of exploring the problem and discovering an answer; (b) *'Reader-based writing'*, which is all the writing that takes place after the first draft; it is writing that will be needed by the intended reader as explanation of what has been discovered, i.e. 'published writing'. How can such different kinds of writing be accommodated in a single 'Science Exercise Book'? They can't. Each needs a different vehicle.

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[3] In a letter to the author. Dr Webb's article, 'A Scientist's Writing Process', in *English in Australia*, September 1980, deserves study.

The first requires, perhaps, a looseleaf 'Science Folder' — or 'Science Notebook' or 'Science Journal' or 'Science Logbook' — a place for jottings, random notes, quantified data, sketches, etc., all of which are for the writer's personal thinking-out needs and are not inhibited by correction or neatness rules. The second can be, perhaps, a 'Science Record', either an exercise book or looseleaf folder, where revised and neatly presented correct writing accumulates. However, some of these writings should also be considered for special publication . . .

(ii) *Many forms of special publication.* Recent years have seen a wealth of ideas about how to 'publish' children's writing (see p. 68). Particularly valuable for science is the idea that every good piece of research should be published *as a book* for circulation in the classroom 'science community' and that it should be shelved in the science section of the classroom or school library. Such books will of course contain very much more than a prose exposition of the research. The teacher will encourage the inclusion of sketches, diagrams, photos, maps, and tables of data, all with appropriate labelling and captions; similarly, collections of, say, botanical or geological specimens need to be labelled and described in reference notes. More widely, there is a place in the classroom for displays, charts, dioramas and reliefs, again with appropriate writing.

(iii) *Science writing in integrated projects.* An increasing amount of science writing is carried out as part of across-the-curriculum projects or themes. For example, a child's question about the germination of seeds can easily become a science experiment with various seeds planted in various weather or light aspects, then this is linked with social studies food problems, then with mankind's leap from gathering to agriculture, and so on. Writing becomes a powerful factor in integrating ideas from all these fields. Moreover, this across-subjects writing can easily show that the distance between science and poetry, science and maths, science and health or art or mass media need not be great — indeed, that there need not be any distance at all for an open, curious, many-sided human being, whether adult or child.

(e) In Health Education

No subject presents more opportunities *every day* for questions, investigation and writing than does this . . . Are these children in my class healthy? What did they eat yesterday? What is TV telling them? What is on sale in the school canteen? What are governments, federal, state and local, advising about health? Is their message getting through? What current controversy about health is in the newspapers? What do parents think? What questions are the children asking? . . .

When life itself offers such starting points, who needs an approach to health education that is programmed in abstract?

Health-conscious teachers, facing daily evidence of health abuse, are tempted to rush in with good advice — to tell, cajole, admonish, moralise. Advice, of course, has value and will have some effect if it proceeds from the good example of a teacher's own way-of-life. (Anti-smoking homilies from a known smoker don't seem to persuade!) But we well know that advice isn't usually the best way to get a message over.

The children need to find themselves in *situations* where they know health is valued and where they feel prompted to ask questions, investigate, look up books in the library (often splendid ones!), write away for information, argue, talk to mum and dad, listen to parent speakers, make notes, draw up reports, and so on. That is, the children need to become actively engaged in health issues — at personal, classroom, family and social levels. In this way, 'Health' is saved from becoming a school subject full of inert 'knowledge-about'; rather, it becomes a living experience motivated by a self-help purpose.

Whether these 'situations' arise in life itself or are set up by the teacher, they allow scope for a good deal of origination of topics and 'ownership' of writing by the children. All the usual kinds of writing will be possible, but the subject suggests a featuring of some forms: letters seeking information, protest or 'query' letters to editors and firms, reports read to the class, 'published' books which contain a child's health research or message or story, and posters, charts and displays which highlight findings. Here are some possible writing opportunities:

- *What Is Health?* This general and basic question can be the focus of an interesting integrated unit of work which makes use of all the forms of writing. The children investigate a diversity of ideas about health, pool their conceptions of what health is, and learn that health is the balanced wholeness of an active, purposeful human being who lives up to responsible decisions he or she has made, based on knowledge of what is established about healthful living.
- *What Are the Main Ingredients of Health?* They can be decided on by discussion and then each can be investigated and reported by groups or individuals. For example,

  interests in life
  exercise and activity
  diet and eating habits
  air and breathing
  sleep and relaxation
  posture, sitting and standing.

  Of course, adjectives like 'good' or 'positive' or 'nutritious' need to be placed in front of each of these ingredients — and that is where discussion, research and decision-making become important.
- *What Are the Main Enemies of Health?* Again, when a list is agreed, there can be investigations and reports. For example, the six 'main ingredients' above could be turned into negatives, and to them could be added

  poor hygiene
  disease
  disregard of safety
  drug abuse (inc. tobacco, alcohol)

  and profit-motivated advertising of second-rate or harmful food and drinks.

- *Everyday Issues.* A 13 year old Sydney boy set the media buzzing for a fortnight when he earnestly and skilfully protested the quality of meat pies by writing to a daily newspaper. Such issues are all around us. Here is a sampling noticed in newspapers as this chapter is written:
  - .. Some health workers put the number of grossly overweight teenagers as high as 20%.
  - .. In one poorer area of Sydney a survey of primary children shows 11% overweight, 53% underweight.
  - .. The average Australian consumes 54 kg of sugar a year.
  - .. A can of Coca-Cola contains the equivalent of 11 lumps of sugar.
  - .. High caffeine levels in drinks may be responsible for insomnia in children.
  - .. Sales increase every year of 'refined' or over-processed foods (foods stripped of some or all of their natural goodness).
  - .. Excessive salt is found in potato crisps and in many sandwich-fillings, e.g. corned beef, Devon sausage, salami, fish paste.
  - .. The food industry spends $93 million a year on advertising, compared to $1 million spent by national health education programs.
  - .. Noise levels at many pop concerts are certain to cause hearing impairment.
  - .. 'Australian children will risk brain damage because of the decision by State Governments not to introduce lead-free petrol until 1985, a leading British lead researcher says.' — *S.M.H.*, 4/5/81.
  - .. 'A sweet tooth can lead to a breakdown in school discipline, according to a report today in the Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology. Three scientists . . . said: "There was a significant relationship between the consumption of sugar and destructive, aggressive behaviour or restlessness." Professor Arnold Bender of the nutrition department at Queen Elizabeth College, London, told the Daily Express: "It's possible some people are affected by sugar in this way. It causes dental decay, diabetes, heart diseases, enlarged livers and damaged kidneys. And yet 20 per cent of the average person's diet is sugar from drinks, cakes, biscuits and sweets."'—*S.M.H.*, 26/5/81.

(f) In Arts and Crafts

Writing has an obvious place within the so-called 'intellectual' subjects, the strongly language-based ones we have considered so far—English, Social Studies, Media Study, Science, and Health. What, however, is writing's role in relation to 'Arts and Crafts'? Some teachers doubt that it has any useful role at all; they see the arts as 'frills', for which there is little or no time in a school day taken up with the 3Rs and the language-based subjects.

But other teachers make important claims for a valued relation between writing and arts and crafts; first, that children can do some valuable writing *about* arts and crafts, second, that both writing and arts and crafts are mutually enhanced when there is a balance of both in integrated studies.

First, on writing about arts and crafts . . . Children do so when, to speak only of the visual arts, they title their work or provide captions. Older children may match quotations from poetry with their own art works, or may themselves write a poetic or prose accompaniment. Note-making is often needed when exploring art history. And although 'picture study' is usually conducted orally, it too can usefully include the jotting of notes; indeed, some teachers find that children only 'get time to think' when everyone writes a few impressions before sharing them in a discussion which also includes the jotting of notes as other pupils' contributions are appreciated.

Moreover, with increasing numbers of primary children now keeping personal Journals, teachers can encourage them to make the arts one of their main concerns; they write down their frank feelings and ideas about arts experiences, but they also do sketches in the Journal, they paste in pictures and photos, and they might run a design through every page (e.g. a border or other pattern). Many an artist, from Leonardo down, has kept a Journal and made it an indispensable repository of diverse forms of self-expression. Used in these flexible ways the Journal is emerging as an unequalled medium of informal, spontaneous integration.

Second, on balancing writing and arts in integrated studies . . . Powerful reasons, old and new, can be marshalled in the cause of increasing the arts component of the primary curriculum. The 'old' reasons include the large place of taste, values and beauty in life, and our need of the arts in harmonising our scattered experiences of a technical, commercialised world. The 'new' reasons come most urgently from recent neuropsychological research: we have not one but two brains to educate and one of them is, in a sense, artistic. That is, every person has two interacting hemispheres; *the left* specialises in analytical, factual, language-linear thinking, and it is served by the 3Rs and 'intellectual' studies; *the right* specialises in wholistic, synthesising, picturing-imagining thinking, and it is served by 'arts' studies.

Our education systems are shown to be 'half-brained' in that they overcultivate the left side of the brain while stinting the right. So, until official curriculum-makers dare to catch up with the implications of modern brain research, each school should use its considerable powers of 'school-based curriculum making' to increase the quantity and quality of arts education in its classrooms. This need not mean a downplaying of either the traditional 'basics' or the 'intellectual' subjects. An impressive and growing body of evidence shows that the arts in fact help 'intellecting'. Here are two recent examples:

- Sydney music teacher Deanna Hoerman ran a Kodaly music course for 1000 5-7 year-olds in a relatively poor area and showed these 'music children' to be: well ahead of others in music skills, well ahead in listening abilities, and ahead in English and Maths (*Artforce* 25, Sydney, 1979).
- Professor Donald Graves researched writing across a sampling of U.S. schools and reported: 'Where writing flourished it was but one of many forms of expression . . .' It succeeded where 'drama, storytelling, music, painting, choral speaking, crafts of all sorts,

> movement and dance were in evidence'. (*Language Art*[illegible] N.C.T.E., May 1978)

From this perspective, it becomes impossible to regard the arts as 'frills'. They become no less basic to learning than the traditional 'basics'. And their beneficial influence is maximised when they are accorded equal status in integrated studies with the 'left-brain' subjects. In integrated units of work, *as in life itself* — and, as we have seen, in informal integrated Journal entries — the arts and the 'intellectual' subjects can continually interweave to their mutual advantage.

It so happens that, because of its unique nature, writing will especially gain from this mutuality. For writing is not only one of the 3Rs and not only a profoundly basic form of 'intellecting', but it is also, in many of its forms, one of the most accessible of the creative arts. Donald Graves has established that very young children usually draw before writing, *as part of the writing process*. That is, they need the artistic act of picture-gathering-of-ideas to collect themselves and discover what it is they want to write about; then they move into successful writing. After perhaps a year of this, they seem to internalise the act of drawing and can move straight into writing.

What has happened, surely, is that the internalised mental-picturing capacity becomes thereafter a part of the writer's individual craft process. But it is a capacity that needs nourishing and stimulating in the ensuing years, and the incomparable way to achieve this is — 'arts and crafts'! . . . One begins to see why Graves found that children's writing flourishes in the midst of *general* artistic expression and enthusiasm.

Denise Hickey[1] presents examples of simple and more elaborate 'integrated units' which include strong elements of writing and arts:

- *A Class Poetry Book.* The children are given much responsibility for writing and selecting poems and devising suitable illustration.
- *The Middle Ages.* The children move into this study in order to compare communication and travel then and now. Interest and the teacher's leadership combine to lead them into a wide-ranging search for pictures and accounts of vehicles, metalwork and thence the whole social life of middle ages Europe. Groups prepare chapters of a class book on the geography, history, guilds, transport, art and crafts, literature, cooking, and even colourful personalities of the period. All this involves reading and research, discussion, and diverse forms of writing, illustrating, model-making, etc. A play, pageant or puppet performance can be scripted and presented as a climax. (N.B. Production of a play can include use of every art form — a marvellous means of relating all the arts.)

Is it necessary to add that this writing in arts-conscious integrated studies — or any other of the arts-related writing we have discussed — allows children great scope for originating their own topics?

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[1] Ideas adapted from her 'Language and the Arts', *P.E.N. 22* (Primary English Teaching Association, Sydney, 1980).

(g) In Mathematics

Has writing any relevance to Mathematics? Even the question comes as a surprise to many teachers, and not least to specialist Maths teachers in secondary and tertiary fields. Behind their attitude lies a long tradition of teaching Maths as an isolated subject.

But there are three strong reasons why we should see this traditional isolation as an absurd state of affairs that we should end forthwith.

First, because mathematics cannot exist independently of ordinary language. Mathematics is itself a language, a symbol-system which enables the meaning-seeking human mind to represent and manipulate on paper the measurable aspects of the physical world. In fact, mathematics can be seen as a small and highly specialised extension of ordinary language. It is 'language of calculation', and all its uses in the world are surrounded and sustained by ordinary language. We carry out our calculating amidst a flurry of verbal thinking and communicating.

Second, because, in any career, mathematics is accompanied by spoken and written communication. The bank clerk intersperses figure work with explaining to clients; the property valuer couches estimates in prose exposition; the engineer embodies specifications in a report which is far more words than calculations; and so on. To these professionals, an isolated mathematics is unthinkable.

Third, because children's natural learning progression is from ordinary language of calculation to mathematical language of calculation. That is, the small child, before going to school, has already done a lot of calculating — using ordinary words to measure objects and relationships . . .

Quantity: one/some, few/many, less/more, etc.
Size: small/big, tiny/huge, thin/fat, etc.
Length: short/long/longer/longest, etc.
Height: low/high, shallow/deep, down/up, etc.
Width: narrow/wide, side to side, etc.
Volume/Capacity: empty/full, small/bulky, etc.
Mass/Weight: light/heavy, weightless/weighty, etc.
Time: slow/fast, early/late, days of week, etc.
Area: square, circle, boundary, limits, etc.
Position: near/far, shut/open, inside, etc.
Number: one/once/first, counting, etc.
Money: price, coin and note names, buy, save, etc.
Calculation: combine/add, take-away/remove/subtract,
  group/multiply, share/divide.

The huge range of meaning in this (limited) list of words shows the great amount of 'informal mathematics' that children have done *in ordinary language* before being introduced at school to new and special symbols and concepts under the stern title, Mathematics. Good teaching, which always begins where the child's understanding presently is, must move cautiously from ordinary-language-understanding into the new, mathematical language.

For these three reasons, the schools — which everyone agrees should get as close to 'real life' as possible — should teach Mathematics in regular association with related uses of spoken and written English.

At the day-by-day level this calls for an *attitude* which implicity conveys to the children that 'English' and 'Mathematics', though separate subjects, are both 'language' and are both learned in much the same way — chiefly, by using them to consider and solve problems that arise in the world.

At times this attitude can be consciously cultivated. For example, those 'ordinary language measurement words' above can be related to the much more specific terms, figures, symbols, methods and concepts of mathematics. Or the point can frequently be made that mathematics, like English, can be read, spoken or written. Maths has a large vocabulary of *words;* every figure and symbol can be spoken and written as a word; and children need practice in spelling such words and using them in sentences, e.g. by translating an equation into an ordinary English sentence:

$$24 - 17 = 7$$

Twenty-four minus seventeen equals seven.

More generally, we can resist the identification in children's minds of the subject, Mathematics, with textbooks if we point to all the real-world problems around us of money, size, distance, quantity, etc. In life we usually handle these by a process of, first, verbal thinking, then perhaps talking, and then the calculating, followed perhaps by talking and writing to communicate our results. This interaction of words and figures is both natural and necessary.

Mathematics needs to be given a regular place in written communication. Not only do the demands of the real world require this, but so does the modern stress on integration of primary subjects. The teaching of Maths in isolation is an anachronism.

- It is not good enough that children should be able to *read* mathematical problems in a textbook; they must also be able to discern such problems in the world and themselves express and *write* them down accurately. They can, for instance, set such problems for one another.

- It is not good enough that they should be able to *solve* mathematical problems in abstract. They must also be able to *use* their solutions by embodying them in letters, quotations, reports, etc. They might, for instance, produce illustrated books for lower classes on mathematical subjects — explaining a concept ('What is subtraction?'), playing with a term ('What is round?'), teaching calculation through a story ('The Cost of My Shopping Spree'), etc.

Children can play an active role in originating and carrying through writing of this integrated kind.

4. Choice from topics originated by the teacher

After the preceding long section (Part B. 3, p. 71) on scope for origination within curriculum limits, we need to glance back to the diagram on p. 61, which shows the child's range of (declining) 'ownership' of writing topics . . . Now we are ready to move to *'Topics chosen by the teacher but allowing children wide choice ('ownership') of content'*. Notice, we are back with 'personal' or 'experience' writing, but instead of 'self-reliant' (p. 64) or 'assisted' (p. 65) origination of topics by the children, the teacher now elects — for whatever reason — to impose a list or an experience which nevertheless allows the children wide choice ('ownership') of content. (Beyond this point there remains only the imposition of both topic and content, with likely loss of children's interest.)

Every teacher has 'good topics' in the repertoire, believed to be close to the children's interests and offering them a wide choice of content. Let us now look at representative examples of such good topics/experiences/stimuli from four areas close to the children: *autobiography* and *imagination* (both of which have a strong narrative element), *description* (which always finds a place in narrative writing), and a specific topic area, *Toys and Games*, which is of special interest to younger children.

(a) Autobiographical Topics

1. *Personal Questions that Arise.* (Teachers know that various personal questions like the following can be talked about and assigned as writing topics.)

'How do you do?' Why do we use common greetings?
'Do you get moody?' Should one do anything about it?
'Do you always know what you want? And want to be?'
'Are you free to be the person you want to be?'
'Do you always know when you're doing right and wrong?'

2. *Recollecting Early Years.*

What are your very earliest memories?
How important was TV in the years before you came to school?
What do you wish your pre-school life had been?
Bring in a photo of yourself as a baby, and write the life story of 'This Beautiful Child!' If a photo can't be spared from the photo album, make a fun-drawing of yourself as baby.

3. *Meet My Family.* (Young children especially find stories of other families a revelation; so, a class sharing can arouse great interest.)

Tell us about your family and close relatives, who they are, where they live, things they do, and their interests and prize possessions.

4. *We Are All 'Ethnics'.* (Discuss 'family tree', 'migrants', 'countries of origin'. Tell the children the story of your ancestry, at least as far back as arrivals in Australia, and demonstrate the construction of a family tree.)

Write a report on 'My Family's Background'.

5. *Share a Special Interest.* (This can produce project-type reporting, following research into the special interest, whether it be a sport, hobby, holiday place, author, etc. — far better than 30 look-alike projects on the same subject!)

Tell the class all about your special interest.

6. *Share an Experience.* (Everyone is to think of an experience, large or small, that others may not have had. The aim is to bring out as many interesting features as possible for several sessions of class sharing.)

Tell the class about a very special experience you have had.

7. *Share a Dream.* (Discuss dreams. Everyone has them, though ability to recollect them varies. Psychologists say we largely sleep in order to dream; the dreams sort out our inner confusions arising from the confusions of life — including TV!)

Tell us about a dream — or dreams, or a recurring dream.

8. *Share a Friendship.* (Nearly everyone can think of a person who is good to be with: 'Here is a chance to describe that person, your common interests, the things you do together, some experiences you have had, occasional disagreements . . .' Anyone who cannot think of such a person can invent an ideal friend.)

Tell us about the person you most enjoy being with.

9. *Starting Points for Social Studies.* (The earliest focus of a social studies course is 'me' — the child as unique and worthy individual — but the teacher soon begins to direct the child's attention outward to social relationships. Here are examples of typical questions which lead from personal to wider concerns.)

What is special about me?
How am I growing and changing?
Am I (and is everyone else) really a unique individual?
What do I have in common with others?
What is 'My Family's Background' (as in 4. above)?

10. *Autobiography.* (This, the writing of a 'book', is an ambitious project. Children usually need to be helped in planning chapters, e.g. a page for each chapter, telling of a stage of life, an interest, a trip, members of the family, even favourite jokes, etc.; perhaps also do a page of illustration facing each chapter-page. Intended readers for the book might be grandparents or parents or cousins or friends.)

Write your autobiography and make a book of it.

(b) Imaginative Topics

1. *Mock-ups.*

- 'Let's use our built-in movie cameras! Close your eyes. Get a picture of a big liner at a wharf . . . (pause). Shift to the crowd on the wharf . . . Zoom in on a few faces, close-ups of your relatives who are seeing you off . . . Now swing to the deck for a close-up of you . . .' etc. [The teacher can prolong this throughout a whole voyage! Link with social studies? When the children come out of it, they burst into talk. Let them choose any part of the adventure to write about. You can take them on a thousand trips, excursions, adventures. *Warning:* Keep to bright, cheerful subjects. Children are very susceptible emotionally: it is immoral to get them stuck in a dictated scene of wretchedness or horror — they get too much of that from TV.]
- 'Let's wander through this landscape painting . . . Do you feel yourself right inside the picture? . . . What time of day is it? . . . What can you hear? . . . What is under your feet? . . . Find a place to sit . . . Go over and talk to that farmer . . .' etc. [After coming out of it, the children talk and then write.]

2. *From Painting into Writing*

First paint one of these scenes, then write about it:

Invasion from Space
Superman, the Modern Hercules
Hercules, the Ancient Superman
Puff, the Magic Dragon
On Board Noah's Ark
City Scene
Bush Scene
Farm Scene
Beach Scene
Circus Scene

3. *Music Stimulus for Writing.* (Relax the children, play some attractive 'mood music', and ask them to allow their minds to mock-up pictures or events broadly consistent with the mood of the music. *Variation:* first read a poem then play the music.)

Listen to this music then write the thoughts it brings to mind.

4. *Everyday Springboards for Imagination.* (Use any simple thing as starter for an imaginative flight that can be written up, e.g. scribble, an inkblot, or palette daubings; a sculpture, picture, or music; a battered coin, an old hat, or a broken cup; an emotive word, an exclaimed phrase, or a dramatic sentence; etc.)

Let this . . . be your springboard into a story.

5. *Bright Titles.* (A title can be enough to spark some children into writing. Why not offer a wide choice of bright titles?).

Choose the title that attracts you and write about it:

Trapped!
Run for your life!
Overdose!
One more drink!
Hurricane Tracey is coming!
No school today!
'Ladies and Gentlemen . . .'
'You are invited to attend . . .'
'The winning ticket is . . .'
'I'm delighted to announce . . .'

6. *My Brilliant Career.* (Ask each child to choose a future career: 'By age 30 I had become a successful . . .' engineer, architect, astronaut, teacher, TV star, sports star, businessman, etc. Discuss and research this career, then write it up from the standpoint of, say, a person who has just retired at age 60.)

Write an autobiography about 'My Brilliant Career'.

7. *'What if I . . .'*

Choose one of these and tell . . .

What if I were the school principal?
What if I were teacher tomorrow?
What if I were wrongly accused of a crime?
What if I were handicapped, in a wheelchair?
What if I were at the controls of The Time Machine?

8. *Dictator for a Day*

Two weeks from now you will be given power to rule the world — for one day! Start planning at once to use this fantastic opportunity, for good or ill. Work out your priorities, listing them in order of importance. Add a statement of the main things you would not change.

9. *Sci-fi or Space Fiction.* (Choose one of the following.)

Write a fantastic view of Earth in the future.
Write a fantastic view of another planet.

10. *Scared Stiff!* (Who can tell the scariest story?)
Write a ghost (or witch) story.

(c) Descriptive Topics

1. *Start with a List.* (Take the children outdoors to a 'scene' — nature, traffic, shopping centre — and have them list the things they see. Allow long lists to develop. Return to the classroom and write the description. Discuss the results. Do lists lead to dull writing? How can we make a scene interesting?) (See 2.)
In paragraphs, write a description of the scene.

2. *Dominant Impression of a Scene.* (Explain that, in reporting a scene, writers carefully *select* only a small number of all the details available; in particular, they organise the description around a 'dominant impression'. Go on a mini-excursion and stop at, say, three scenes, each time discussing what might be selected as the dominant impression and how much other detail might be used and linked to it.)
Write up one of the scenes we have observed today.

3. *Real Scene or Recollected Scene?* (Go out and observe a scene, but do not take any notes. Tell the children they should look carefully; then return to the classroom and write up the scene. Read the pieces, and discuss variations. Next day, go to another scene, broadly similar to the first; this time, allow the making of notes. Return, write, discuss. Is this writing noticeably different? Is writing from memory more effective?)
Write a scene from memory, without the help of notes.
Write a scene with the help of notes. Compare the two methods.

4. *Describe a Picture.* (Don't buy commercial sets of pictures. Ask the children to bring pictures in — they will flood you! Paste the most promising ones on light card or cover them in plastic . . . The children can then choose from the set of 50 . . . or 100. Use a 'look-talk-then-write' method. Either confine a given piece of writing to description or allow it to flow into narrative.)
Choose a picture, look at every detail in it, discuss it with a writing partner, then write a description of it.

5. *Describe an Incident.* (Arrange with two children to have a dispute which erupts 'unexpectedly' in class. It need only take two minutes, e.g. a bitter appeal to the teacher to stop some misbehaviour — 'X is always picking on me!' Ask everyone, without discussion, to write up what happened; then compare these eye-witness accounts . . . How reliable are eye-witnesses?)
Well, that was quite a drama! I would like you to write at once an eye-witness account of what happened. (*Variation.* Whenever something out of the ordinary happens in the classroom it can become the subject of an immediate 'factual report'.)

6. *Reporter at Work.* (Reporting usually flows from simple description to narration. Try, on this occasion, to keep mainly to describing. Ask the children to keep notes for a week on any newsworthy school happenings.)
Report 'The Week at . . . School' for the local newspaper.

7. *Describe a Character.* (Discuss how in stories the 'feel of life' often begins to reach us through an author's accurate description of a character. How is this achieved? Probably by exact writing about three 'levels' of the person: (i) physical appearance, (ii) personality, (iii) manner of relating to others and doing things. Stage a few improvised encounters, using a distinctive character in each, e.g. a confident person shopping, a shy person asking directions, a charming person offering to help someone.

Write a description of one of the encounters you have just seen.

8. *A Favourite Character.* (Most children are eager to discuss at least one TV, film or book character. Carry on the work of 7. by writing a description of this person.)

Write a description of your favourite character.

9. *Describe the Family.* (Ask the children to observe the members of their families for a week, perhaps making descriptive notes in preparation for a major writing. Again, this continues the work of 7.)

Write a description of each member of your family.

10. *Describe a Game.* (This is not an easy assignment. It requires a disciplined sequencing of directions or rules; it flows over from description into exposition.)

Take a playground game and, for a visitor from another country, describe exactly how it is played.

Note. The last topic is included because it is on the borderline; beyond, in the 'declining range of ownership' (p. 61), lies strong prescription of both topic and content by the teacher. Surely very little of that is needed in either primary or junior secondary schools.

(d) Writing about Toys and Games

For the younger ones especially, toys and games can be valuable means of launching children into the activities of displaying, demonstrating, making, talking and writing. Here is a sample of writing activities . . .

1. *Make a Poster.* (You have asked every child to bring in a toy or game for a *display.* Depending on age-level the children may do any of these: each writes a label; writes a description; uses the stack of labels to draw up a colourful poster to advertise the display. Or a single poster may be drawn up by the whole class.)

Let's make a poster for 'The Big Toy and Game Display'.

2. *Write a Poem.* (Using, perhaps, the suggestions on poetry writing, p. 172, ask the children to write a poem about a toy, either an individual choice or one which has captured the whole class's attention. Music such as 'The Teddy Bears' Picnic' could be used to create atmosphere.)

Let's write a poem about a favourite toy.

3. *Write a Story.* (Perhaps after a visit to a toyshop, ask the children to talk about the toys they liked most; then each writes about the toy of his or her choice. Encourage a variety of approaches, e.g. my toy comes to life, or what happened when I took my toy to the park, or a fantastic use of my toy, or an 'Old Toymaker's Triumph', or even a letter

reporting to Santa on 'What Happened To That Beautiful Toy You Left Me'.)

Let's write a story about the best toy you saw in the Toyshop.

4. *Make a Book.* (Ask each child to make, or contribute to the making of, a book about a favourite toy or game — descriptions, explanations, rules, stories, illustrations, what-it-means-to-me, who plays with it, etc.)

5. *Write a Class Play.* (As a class, or in groups, write a play on a toy theme, e.g. all the toys in the toyshop you visited come to life at midnight and talk about their hopes and fears — till dawn.)

Let's write a play about, 'When the Toys All Came to Life'.

6. *Toys in History.* (A research project: the class visits the school library to find what it contains about toys in earlier times — anywhere from Ancient Egypt and China to the 19th Century. Everyone contributes notes and drawings to produce a file or book. *Variation:* 'Toys of Other Lands', stressing the multicultural theme.)

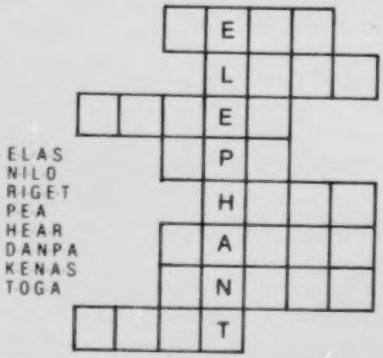
Let's find out all we can about toys in times gone by.

7. *Reporter at Work.* (Prepare young children for a visit from an older class. An older child takes a young one and knows how to ask questions: What is your favourite toy — or game? How did you get it? Where do you keep it? How do you play with it? and so on. The answers are noted. The older children return a week later, each with a small well-illustrated book, which is read and re-read and left as a gift with the young 'author'.)

Let's get ready for a special visit from Year 5 students.

8. *Riddles and Crossword Book.* (Whether for a single book or separated into two books, make up riddles about toys and devise crosswords. The riddles give clues to, 'What toy am I?' or 'What game am I?' The crosswords can be general, or based on a book, a health topic, a science inquiry, animals, etc. Many formats for crosswords are available.)

Let's all contribute to 'Our Riddle and Crossword Book'.



Can you unjumble these words so that each is an animal's name, then fit them in the right squares?

by courtesy of Sutherland Shire Library

9. *Anthology of Play Rhymes.* (Here is a piece of valuable original research that the class can carry out collectively. Play rhymes are different from 'nursery rhymes', which adults invent and teach to children; they are rhymes probably invented by children themselves and passed on in an entirely oral tradition — rhymes for skipping, hand-clapping, ball-bouncing, 'elastics', or choosing sides for a game.

First the children can write down the ones they know, then make inquiries of other children, then of parents. Brought together, all the contributions will make a fascinating book. *Variation:* Compile a 'Best Skipping Games' book.)

Let's gather all the play rhymes we can find.

10. *The Rules of the Game.* (This is no easy task and should not be asked of any but the most enthusiastic child or group. Disciplined, logically sequenced writing is called for. Even then, elaborate games should not be attempted, but rather the 'playground' and 'made-up' varieties. The purpose of the writing is to 'make the rules of your game available to others'.)

Let's write down the rules of a game you enjoy.

C. Writing in Integrated Studies[1]

A Format for Planning . . .

AN INTEGRATED UNIT

- *Introduction:* But what is 'integration'?

> 'Any *experiences* can frame the integrated learning unit, so long as they make sense to the children, or, better still, enthuse them. Integration? Wholeness is its essence, and every whole when examined proves to be made up of a complexity of parts. In a curriculum context, integration is an activity, experience or set of experiences that crosses subject boundaries. The integrated approach says, provide experiences first, exercises second; indeed, the most worthwhile exercises will be ones shown to be needed by weaknesses appearing in the way the children handle the experiences.' — Adapted from 'Balance in the Classroom', by McCulla and Walshe, P.E.T.A., 1979.

Step 1 **Selection of the Topic**

Preliminary Question: What preceded this Unit?
(The children must see a connection between this and previous learning — perhaps the Unit proposes to explore a problem or interest that arose during the preceding unit. Quite unacceptable is an imposed unit or theme conceived in isolation.)

QUESTION: *Which criteria guide my search for the best topic?*
Suggestions:

- Greatest spur to learning is the learner's own interest.
- Interest is guaranteed when the child has a sense of 'ownership' of a

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[1] Integrated studies are infinitely various. One can only say of the place of writing within them that it should be prominent at many points. This 'format' is jointly authored by Barry Dwyer, President of P.E.T.A., and R. D. Walshe.

topic/unit. Possibilities (in descending order of 'ownership'):
(a) individuals, groups or the whole class originate the topic;
(b) teacher prescribes broad topic, but allows individual exploration;
(c) teacher thinks up a good topic and imposes it — nicely!

- A useful test of a 'good topic': Does it release, in the early stages, enthusiastic investigation and self-expression by the child? Only this early momentum will carry the child through the later, more disciplined stages which require some polished productions (e.g. craft work for a display, or 'published' writing for readers in another class).
- The 'good topic' is never so long as to exhaust children's interest.

UNIT TOPIC: ....

Step 2 **Justification**

QUESTION: *Is this Unit worth doing? How will it promote worthwhile learning?*

(Tick whichever of the following purposes will be served. Any others?)

☐ Because it is intrinsically self-motivating for the children?
☐ Because it is the logical next step in their learning?
☐ Because it favours basic primary learning: literacy/numeracy?
☐ Because it fosters thinking-and-communicating behaviours?
☐ Because it integrates the main primary 'subjects' (English, Maths, Social Studies, Science, Health, Media, Arts & Crafts)?

Step 3 **An Entry Experience — and Questions**

QUESTION: *What significant 'entry' experience have the children had (or can I now provide for them) that focuses their attention and engenders problems and questions?*

The Entry Experience: ....

('Experiencing is only the beginning of knowledge,' said Abraham Maslow. What counts is what one *does* with an experience. And what one does — what one learns — generally begins with questions.)

Questions arising from the experience:

1. *A Focus or Central Question* (if possible): ....

....

2. *Contributing Questions* (Some will come from whole-class brainstorming, others will be generated by the ongoing work. If the initial questions are displayed on a chart, additions can easily be made. Questions may be grouped, e.g. Personal/Social/Environmental/Arts.

Individual children can be encouraged to select specific questions for exploration.):

Step 4 Expectations

QUESTION: *What expectations of (a) knowledge (b) values (c) concepts (d) skills (e) productions can be specifically stated at the outset (apart from my expectation of general improvement arising from enthusiastic activities)?*
(N.B. Additions can be made as the Unit proceeds.)

(a) *Knowledge to be gained* (obviously this will include answers to Step 3 questions, but particularly . . .):

(b) *Values to be emphasised* (e.g. sensitivity, cooperation, kindliness, justice, freedom.

(c) *Concepts to be developed* (e.g. related to self, society, culture, environment, change):

(d) *Skills to be acquired or improved* (while a checklist of many relevant skills will help me watch the diverse needs of individuals, only the following few can be watched for the class as a whole . . .):

(e) *Productions* (to be polished, completed, 'published'; e.g. craftwork, account of science experiment, play, dance, social studies report):

Step 5 **Resources**

QUESTION: *How can I swiftly mobilise resources that will meet the needs likely to be felt by the children?*

(N.B. The richness of the resources will strongly influence the activities and outcomes of the Unit.)

Resources can come from:

☐ Myself: ....

☐ Other Teachers: ....

☐ Children: ....

☐ Librarian: ....

☐ Parents: ....

☐ Wider Community: ....

Step 6 **Learning Activities**

QUESTION: *What will the children be DOING? Can they be involved in planning and then be allowed a good deal of freedom to choose and work on projects within framework of Unit?*

Each child's activities within the Unit are usefully viewed by the teacher as consisting of four interacting competencies or behaviours[2]: (1) *experiencing,* the 'entry' experience and a flow of ensuing experiences, which include the following three intensive learning experiences; (2) *investigation* of questions engendered by the experiences; (3) *self-expression,* as realisations take place; and (4) *communication* with others, especially through the major 'productions' planned in Step 4 (e).

(1) *Possible EXPERIENCE BEHAVIOURS*

While resourceful people can make something of whatever 'experience' is thrust upon them, they, like the rest of us, would agree that the best experience is usually self-chosen; it not merely makes sense but promises to be interesting or rewarding and so can be entered into with enthusiasm. An experience 'behaviour' is the whole handling of any of the infinite variety of possible experiences, brief or lengthy, simple or complex: an *event, excursion, discussion, problem, experiment, protest, dream, interview, game, drama, poem, article, book, visitor, TV program,* etc. (If the experience is teacher-devised, we must ask, 'will it be an experience *to the children?'* To some it may only seem a happening — humdrum school-stuff, a non-experience!) But, remembering that 'experiencing is only the beginning of knowledge', the child proceeds to three, more specific learning behaviours . . .

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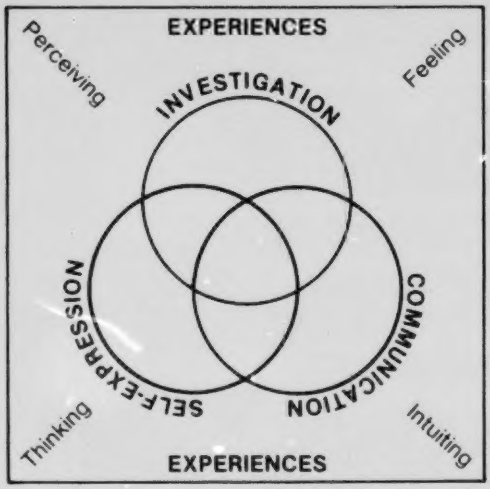
[2] Two of these four behaviours may be viewed broadly, as *'impressions'* (experiences/investigation) and the other two as *'expressions'* (self-expression/communication). The need of schools to balance a child's impressions and expressions is compelling: 'The essence . . . of the life of any creative human being is the dual capacity to be receptive, to be open to IM-pression, and at the same time to be capable, through talent, emotions, intelligence, work and discipline, of EX-pression: when these two activities are in balance, there is usually also a balance within the individual.' (Laura Huxley, *This Timeless Moment*)



The Integrated Learning Situation

The learner, given a context of experiences meaningful to him or her, may be viewed as spontaneously manifesting 'the four elements of consciousness' (Jung) — perceiving, feeling, thinking, intuiting — while deliberately pursuing learning by means of three main, interacting learning behaviours which are always present in an integrated unit: investigation, self-expression, communication. The model does not show two other learning behaviours which *may* also be present: (a) example-following, imitation, copying, (b) repetition, practising, drills.

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(2) *Possible INVESTIGATION BEHAVIOURS*

These begin with the questions of Step 3 and may include such multi-skill behaviours as:

- observing (looking, noting, measuring, calculating, charting, etc.)
- using other senses (listening, smelling, tasting, touching)
- reading, asking, note-making, exploratory talk, writing-to-discover
- questioning ('problematising'), experimenting, hypothesising, testing
- ordering (sequencing, grouping, comparing, classifying)
- reasoning (generalising, inferring, avoiding common fallacies)
- sharing (joint-planning, cooperating in research, assisting the weak)

(3) *Possible SELF-EXPRESSION BEHAVIOURS*

Every person needs opportunities for frequent self-expression, that is, for activity which has for its main purpose the personal satisfaction of doing it. Self-expression flourishes when given considerable *freedom*. It can find outlet in any of these expressive forms:

talking
writing
handwriting
calculating
drawing, painting
music, singing
dance, movement
critical reading
drama
choral speaking
audio-visual
crafts
constructing
cookery
playing
sports

(4) *Possible COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOURS*

Every 'self-expression behaviour' is potentially also a 'communication behaviour'; the difference is that the latter adds concern-for-audience to self-expression's 'pleasure in doing it for my own sake'. There will of course be plenty of oral communication throughout the Unit, but a degree of *discipline* will be needed to complete the communication 'products' planned in Step 4(e) — to make them fit for presentation. Thus, while writing or a painting may be left at draft stage, having satisfied the need for self-expression, it must be revised/polished/'published' to reach and communicate to an audience: the disciplined revision turns the work into communication — perhaps a 'published' book for the classroom library or a painting eligible for exhibition in the school foyer. Most 'productions' will have for their audience the classroom community of peers and teacher, with a spillover to other classes, parents, and the wider community.

N.B. On a separate sheet, list the main activities/behaviours for the whole class, groups, individuals.

Step 7 **Evaluation**

QUESTION: *How can I evaluate so as to help each child to be a more effective learner — without my bogging down in record-keeping?*

- Mainly, make additions to your anecdotal 'profile' of scribbled observations of each child, perhaps keep some work samples, ask the children to self-evaluate their performance, involve them in collective discussion of the effectiveness of the day-by-day learning, and finally 'evaluate' by telling each child where a few improvements can be made.
- Reflect on 'My own performance in handling this Unit' — with an eye to doing even better next time. Look at the Step 6 list of 'Four Main Learning Behaviours' and take comfort from the fact that the greatest computer in the world couldn't assess and evaluate for a single child everything that happens in doing/thinking/learning. So don't feel guilty if *you* can't. The aim of 'Evaluation' is to add a few records to your classroom observations so that you can help each child in at least a few pressing ways.

D. A Message to Parents

Note. The school principal or class teacher may care to send out this letter *and its following suggestions.* It will probably need to be modified to suit local conditions and the age of the children. Please modify it as you wish, and add or delete suggestions. No acknowledgment need be made. — R.D.W.

Dear Parent,

Your child's writing is a top priority with us.

This letter invites you to cooperate with the school in developing the best possible *attitude* to that writing.

Writing is extremely important in learning. Your child will be doing some writing on every school day throughout the primary and secondary years — recording key ideas, stating opinions, communicating thoughts to others . . . I am referring not to handwriting but to what used to be called 'composition', *the ability to express ideas clearly on paper*, an ability that makes a child confident in handling classwork, day by day.

Do you know that all advanced countries are giving writing a higher priority in the 1980s than ever before? There are good reasons why. Not only is writing needed for success in modern school learning, but it will be needed more and more in career and job-retraining courses at colleges or universities. Certainly it is needed increasingly by people who want to rise in careers — think of all the applications, memos and reports that must be written. And it is needed to cope with today's many problems, of writing a consumer complaint, an accident report, an objection to a local government measure, or whatever else.

So you see why your child will gain from a good *attitude* to writing. But how can we adults — parents and teachers — foster that attitude? Neither advice nor nagging will succeed!

There's an old saying, 'Children never listen to what adults *tell* them, but they copy what adults *do*'. We teachers will be doing some writing with the children. Will you do some with your child? I will list, on the next page, a range of home writing ideas; *and here is a suggested home policy on writing:*

- Let your child see you writing.
- Talk about the writing you are doing, or intend to do.
- Ask your child to add to letters you write to relatives.
- As part of your interest in school, ask about current writing.
- Provide a quiet place to write, away from the noise of TV.
- Have good children's books in the home (borrowed from the library or bought): good readers tend to become good writers.
- Firmly control TV-viewing, so the set is not on *all* the time, but only for selected shows. Then there is time for 'the other things in life', including reading and writing.

I'm sure we can together create this good *attitude* to writing and that it will indeed benefit your child's future.

Yours sincerely,

Ideas for Writing in the Home

Can you help your child to become a ready-and-willing writer? Yes, by showing that writing, as well as reading, is valued in your home — that yours is 'a writing family'. Leave the harder parts of learning-to-write to the school and concentrate on useful and interesting writing. Ask your child to combine as much illustration as possible with the writing. Help with spelling when asked but don't 'correct everything', for this is home writing for pleasure. Do praise whenever you can. *Here are some ideas that other families have found rewarding . . .*

- *Write FOR a Beginner.* For a child who hasn't started to write, you can act as *scribe* (a person who writes what another speaks); thus you ask your child to speak a message to a relative and you write it into a letter; or you write the spoken account of 'My Best Toy', then you read this little story back, pointing to each word, till your child knows it by heart.
- *Write ABOUT a Beginner.* You could write a short story in which your child is the central character, choosing a role you know will appeal. Then present it and read it (as in the previous item).
- *Write Your Biography.* Children are very interested in their parents' backgrounds. Could both parents write of *their* childhood, telling about their parents, homelife and school? (And add photos of themselves as children?)
- *Keep a Family Diary.* Write in it all the big happenings — trips, treats, troubles. Also yearly heights and weights. You do the writing while the children are small, but they dictate the words. Later they will take over. Encourage drawings, pasting in of photos, travel brochures, letters from grandparents, etc.
- *Be Your Child's Librarian.* Keep every finished piece of writing and drawing — and date it! As your child gets older, your care will be appreciated. The collection will be the source of endless interest and not a little laughter.
- *Become a Note-writing Family.* Leave notes around: 'Dear Helen, You've tidied your room! Lovely! — Mum' . . . 'Dear John, Don't forget we love a clean car! — Dad' . . . 'Dear Mum, Thanks for mending my blouse! — Marie'. Leave them on beds, in school cases, or stuck with magnets to the refrigerator.
- *Start a Home Notice Board.* Every busy family needs one! Located in kitchen or dining room, it carries notes, cards, jokes, school reports, letters, drawings, etc. A great place to 'show off' writing.
- *Do Very Practical Writing.* Examples: Ask a 5-6-7 year old to write the shopping list as you go through the cupboards and call out the items . . . Ask every member of the family to write a favourite menu — it just might be consulted on a birthday! . . . Ask your child to read the business letters that come to the home and notice how different they are from personal letters; then show the replies you write.
- *Make Writing a Game.* You can ask your child — at the right moment — to try out particular *forms* of writing: signs, telegrams, invitations, letters, ads, news reports, poems, plays, stories, comics, song lyrics, etc. Subjects are unlimited: real or made-up events,

dreams, ghosts, space fiction, etc. Don't underrate your child's ability to invent topics.

- *Make a Scrapbook of Events.* 'Holiday' or 'Big Events of the Year' can be written up in a special scrapbook, with drawings, photos, travel brochures included. There are so many things to see! In years to come, such a scrapbook will prove much more interesting than a mere photo album.
- *Letters of All Sorts.* Your child can write to relatives, friends, penfriends. Don't forget thank-you letters for a gift or after a visit. Encourage an older child to write letters-of-opinion to newspapers, TV channels, people in the public eye, etc. Letters to relatives are best when everyone writes a section (a pre-schooler draws).
- *Make Your Own Cards.* Scorn expensive commerical cards; instead make your own cards, perhaps from coloured paper, with an added photo or illustration, and some written thoughts or news. Send them to say 'Merry Christmas!' 'Happy Birthday!' 'Congratulations!' or 'Get-well'.
- *Give a Journal (or Diary) as a Present.* This kind of writing is again growing in popularity. Not just the old diary-of-daily-doings, a Journal is a place for best ideas, records of major events, cuttings, pictures, photos, poems, song-lyrics . . . a collection of treasured items. It can be given at any age. If begun for a pre-schooler, the child will later take over the writing. (Parents must respect the privacy of this personal Journal; it must never be read without the child's permission.)
- *Make Special Books.* Children love to make and keep 'books'. Their earliest ones are usually scrapbooks, e.g. 'My Book of Cars', perhaps with added drawings of their own. But original writing will soon appear. Here are ideas for possible books:

'Our Holiday to Darwin'
'Our Visit to a Farm'
'Jokes Collected by the Family'
'Our Family's Favourite Poems'
'Our Family's Favourite Recipes'
A story (illustrated)
A story for a small child
'History of Our Family'
'Grandma's Stories about the Family'

PART IV

The Conference Approach to Learning to Write (and Read)

Three schools in St. George Region of the N.S.W. Department of Education launched a teaching-of-literacy research program in 1981 that is attracting national interest. The schools are Grays Point, Hurstville South and Sylvania Heights. All their Kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2 classes, 27 in number, are taking part. The work of these classes is coordinated by Project Organiser, Jan Turbill . . . The following report is a response to requests received by P.E.T.A. from many parts of Australia for an introduction to the program, which is based on what is popularly termed 'the conference approach', after its most distinctive feature.[1]

Introduction

The 'conference approach' begins by asking a fundamental question: What is the main language strength that children bring to school at age 5? It is, surely, a command of oral language. So this approach boldly invites the children to pick up a pen and 'Write!' — that is, begin at once to write the words of their oral vocabulary, many of which have been in use for years.

But can these school-beginners possibly do so? Previously, it was thought, children had to be taught reading, handwriting and spelling before they could be trusted to write.

The answer is that the 'conference approach', knowing how strongly children want to write in their very first days at school, encourages them to move fearlessly into writing by *inventing* the spelling of their oral-language words. This avoids a long postponement of original writing. It is a practicable procedure because, as we shall see, researchers have found that any child who is armed with only half a dozen or more consonants can begin to spell. The first attempts are of course spare and simple but they improve quickly. Using 'invented spelling' the children eagerly set about printing their way to control of spelling, writing, handwriting and, not least, reading.

But doesn't the 'Language-Experience' approach also make use of a child's oral language, with the teacher *scribing* what the child says? To some extent, yes, but then the pen is in the teacher's hand, not the child's. The difference is great. Through 'invented spelling' *the child*

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[1] The Primary English Teaching Association sponsored the visit to Australia in 1980 of Professor Donald H. Graves, the principal U.S. researcher of the 'conference approach'. P.E.T.A. subsequently published *Donald Graves in Australia* (Sydney, 1981)(120 pp.), ten articles on many aspects of the approach. In the following report, the initials, D.G., indicate a quotation drawn from that book or from letters from Professor Graves to the Association.

Drawing will flow into beginning writing, using 'invented spelling'. (Photos in this section were taken during a visit to six K-2 'conference approach' classrooms at Grays Point Primary School. The approach is equally relevant to all later years of education.)

begins writing from the start. Dependence on the teacher is avoided. It is a smooth, organic movement out of oral and into written language — and reading too is being learned, incidentally but powerfully.

Invented spelling contributes usefully to the conference approach in the beginning years of writing. Throughout these and all the later years, the approach may be viewed as resting on four main pillars. The first is the *conferences* themselves, frequent brief discussions between individual child and teacher, enabling interest to be shown and help to be given when asked for. The second is *ownership*, by which is meant leaving the control of both topic and writing with the child. The third is *process*, that is, opportunities to practise writing as drafting-revising-polishing rather than as a one-shot act. The fourth is *time*, the allotting of adequate curriculum time, in the knowledge that any fluent control of language requires plenty of practice.

Let us look at how 'invented spelling'[2] works and then consider in some detail each of the four main 'pillars' of the conference approach . . .

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[2] The recent impetus to 'invented spelling' comes partly from the research of Glenda Bissex of Harvard University. Her important book is *GNYS AT WRK* (Harvard Uni. Press, 1980). However, more than seventy years ago the great Italian educationist, Maria Montessori, observed preschool children in factory areas composing words after being taught the alphabet, *before they could read*. The long-established Rudolf Steiner schools teach writing before reading, so children largely learn to read through their own writing.

Invented Spelling

Children don't need to be taught to read before we allow them to write. They seem to know this instinctively. If we ask them to 'Write!' before they are given any writing instruction, they gravely *do something* with crayon, pen or pencil, even if it appears to be 'scribble' or if it is a drawing without any attempt at words. But we should take these expressions seriously as establishing each child's readiness-point for individualised classroom writing.

In the past, many attempts have been made to devise a way to move children from that readiness-point into regular writing. The conference approach chooses 'invented spelling' as the most natural possible way. One researcher has found that 'a child who knows six sound-symbol relationships (usually consonants) can begin to write' (D.G.). Many children already know more than that, and those who don't know any can easily be shown some.

- The teacher simply asks the child to write whatever sounds he or she hears in a word (or remembers having seen in a spelling).
- Children *tend* to begin their inventing of spelling by writing only the first consonant they hear in a word (e.g. L for 'liked'); later they might add a prominent end consonant (LT or LK), and later still a vowel (LAKT). These earliest attempts to represent *sounds* are gradually refined as *sight* letters (visual/graphic) are increasingly remembered from reading, for much reading is also proceeding day by day. Thus the daily influences of integrated listening-writing-reading serve to move the child rapidly towards standard spelling, e.g. 'liked' might develop in a single year through, say, L-LT-LKT-LAKT-LOKT-LIKT-LIKD-LIKED.
- In other words, natural classroom pressure moves *invention* towards correctness. While part of this pressure comes from the parallel

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A Comparison of Learning-to-talk with Learning-to-write by the Conference Approach

beginning . . . 'incessant chatter' →	child originates or 'owns' the utterances	parent shows one-to-one interest and offers help	opportunities to communicate by framing and reframing utterances	time for practising is abundant	= TALKING
beginning . . . 'invented spelling' →	**ownership:** child controls own topics and writes originally	**conference:** teacher shows one-to-one interest and offers help	**process:** opportunities to draft, revise, polish	**time:** curriculum space for practice	= WRITING

The conference approach can claim a kind of naturalness by pointing to the parallel between its central principles for learning-to-write from age 5-6 and the central needs of every infant in learning-to-talk from age 1-2.
Invented spelling parallels the infant's early 'incessant chatter'.
Conference parallels the role of parents and other listening audiences.
Ownership of writing parallels the infant's control over early utterances.
Process of writing parallels the infant's efforts to make speech-meaning clear.
Time, to practise writing regularly, parallels the great amount of time spent by the apparently self-absorbed infant in learning to talk by talking abundantly.

reading program, it comes no less from the great amount of reading being done *while writing* — writing and reading continually reinforce each other.

- The teacher does not correct the child's first draft, but will write down a spelling if asked. (If a child's 'book' is 'published', the teacher will edit the spelling after explaining that this is what editors do to ensure that everyone can read books.)
- There is plenty of peer talk about story-line and spelling, and much reading of one another's writing.
- While spelling, a child often makes audible and sub-audible 'phonic' sounds, for at this transition stage the writing is more a *speech event* than a writing event.
- Accompanying the child's invention of spelling will be original invented marks which try to capture speech-emphasis, e.g. enlarged letters, bold letters, capitals, underlinings, multiple exclamation marks. These inventions too are accepted, even encouraged; later they will be voluntarily discarded as the child learns to rely on conventional forms.

1. Conference

Traditional teaching of writing emphasised drill and whole-class methods; it concentrated on the mechanics or conventions of writing, while commonly lamenting that children had little of interest to write about. By contrast, the conference approach is a friendly but powerful

Topics are self-chosen. Children are free to work alone or share work-in-progress. There is often keen interest in one another's work.

teaching/learning method which elevates the child's ideas to the primary position and yet allows plenty of scope for attention to the 'conventions', especially in conference on each child's work.

- A 'conference' is a one-to-one conversation between child and teacher about a piece of writing. (Children can also learn to confer together; this is 'peer conference'.)
- Several conferences usually take place as one piece develops.
- A conference is usually brief — two or three minutes. It can be even briefer, as in response to a specific question, but it can also be extended in cases of need.
- Most children can choose their next writing topics without help, but some need the stimulus of a conference.
- 'At the core of the conference is a teacher asking a child to teach her about the subject. The aim is to foster a bursting desire to inform. So the teacher never implies a greater knowledge of this topic than the child possesses, nor treats the child as an inferior learner. We are in the business of helping children to value what they know. Ideally, the poorer the writing the greater the interest the teacher will show in it — or rather in what it might become.' (D.G.)

What skills of conferencing does a teacher need to develop?

- Essentially, the conference is supportive: the teacher lets the child know she is interested in what he or she has to say.
- The teacher responds first to what the child has to say (the 'message' or 'content'); only after appreciating that, and, if possible, praising the manner of saying it ('style' or 'form'), might the teacher move to a 'teaching point' — a suggestion about improvement.
- All the time, the teacher resists an 'adult temptation' — to direct, to take 'ownership' of the writing away from the child.
- Mostly the teacher beams goodwill *and asks questions* — or answers them if the child asks for help.
- A conference usually opens with the child telling in a sentence what the writing is about (or the stage it has reached), then reading the piece aloud.
- If the piece is long, the teacher may say, 'Read me the part you like best' — or, '. . . your most exciting part'. Then perhaps, 'Do you want to read me any part you aren't happy about?'
- The teacher avoids generalised responses like, 'You are doing well' or 'This isn't good enough'; instead she asks specific questions like, 'Do you know yet how you will end your story?' or 'Why didn't John tell his parents?' or 'What do you mean by this sentence?'
- As skill in receiving writing grows, a teacher can often swiftly discern the point at which a child 'gets lost'; that is, the 'writer's voice' has broken down, and meaning has grown scrappy.
- '. . . all the surface mechanics (handwriting, spelling, punctuation) and all the grammar children need to know in primary school can be adequately taught in conference — at the point of children's needs.' (D.G.) However, other influences are also working to this end, such as the day by day interchanges among the children and the whole-class sharing of 'published' writing.

- Conferencing calls for good classroom management if it is to achieve individualisation in a class of 30. Some examples: a teacher rosters two groups of four children each day; another invites in parent aides; another encourages 'writing partners' to be active while allowing free access to herself (usually a small queue) for conferencing . . . There is great scope for experiment, scope for individual teaching styles. 'Conference' classrooms have much in common but each also has individual features.

2. Ownership

At its core, the conference approach is concerned to produce a self-reliant learner, one who does not depend on teacher direction. A consequence is that 'ownership' of writing — of what is often the deepest and most careful thinking the child does — must not be taken over by the teacher. 'From the first day of school we must leave control of the writing with the child — the choice of topic and the writing itself. Then children write more and care more, even about the appearance of the writing on the page. We teachers must become totally aware of our awful daily temptation to take control away from them whether by too much prescription or correction or even advice.' (D.G.)

- Nothing influences the child's attitude to writing more than the choice of topic. Having personally chosen a topic, the child is likely to exert strong efforts to bring it to a successful conclusion, especially if teacher or peers express interest in it.
- At first children have difficulty. Some will have no faith that their topics will be of interest to anyone. Some won't be able to devise a topic without the help of a conference. Time and experience will improve all this — but never completely.
- Even professional writers are at times stuck for a topic; it is part of a recurring problem they call 'writer's block'. When children experience this, teachers may turn to special measures which help them to choose topics. For example:

  children keep a growing list of 'Topics I Might Write About'
  a brainstorming devises 'Twenty Writing Topics' (suggestions)
  classroom chart proclaims 'Favourite Writing Topics' (suggestions)
  children interview each other to discover interesting topics
  writing partners are expected to help each other find topics
  partners can at times work together on one piece of writing.
- The teacher may promote activities likely to give rise to writing:

  excursions, mini-excursions, visits
  interviews, improvisations, discussions of problems
  story-telling, reading for information, narrative poems, etc.
- The teacher may provide structures, leaving to the children the choice of content, e.g.

  letters (personal, business, requests for information, to-the-editor)
  cards, with illustration (anniversaries, congratulations, get-well)
  poems (many forms, e.g. couplets: 'Red is . . .'; 'I like . . ., I don't like . . .')
  plays, scripts (dialogue form).

Writing requires time to think. Any moment of classroom writing will be marked by a variety of composing behaviours — outwardly as well as inwardly!

This offering of a new structure(s) can also help to lift a child from the 'groove' of continually repeating one structure (or topic area).

- The teacher may sometimes meet severe cases of 'writer's block' by asking the child to carry out some form of free writing, e.g.

  Streaming: 'Write whatever comes into your head.'
  Speed: 'See how many words you can write in X minutes.'
  Completion: 'See how much story you can add to this (sentence/phrase)'.
  Or young children can be asked to write down words, or do a drawing and caption it, or find some writing they like and copy it.

- We mustn't despair if young children sometimes don't want to write. The same reluctance is a commonplace of every writing class, even of voluntary adult classes. Ideas like the ones above help us in our efforts to remedy the 'block'. Even so, complete success is usually unattainable where there are so many human variables.
- At all stages, the teacher promotes the idea of the importance of writing — writing is important for success at school and success in the world. Even more effective is the force of example. The teacher shows herself to be a writer, not only talking about the letters and other writing she does, but sometimes writing alongside the children: 'Write as often as you comfortably can . . . But if you can't manage more, then, at the very least write for five minutes a week with your class.' (D.G.)

- The ideas above are mainly concerned with 'ownership' through topic-choice, but the teacher is equally intent on leaving control of the writing itself with the child. This includes being able to write without fear of over-correction. The art of conferencing is largely the art of not taking ownership away by directing, correcting or advising too much.

- As children move upward in the primary school, they are asked to write increasingly about the 'content subjects'. Topic-choice is more limited than it was in earlier (personal experience) years. But if they have acquired confidence as writers and choosers, they will still be able to find topics for themselves, provided the teacher offers a choice within broad subject limits.

- *The Writing Folder or Collection.* Teachers experiment with this to find a form that promotes pride of ownership of the writing. Most seem to favour a looseleaf work-in-progress folder plus the Folder proper (i.e. the collection of drafts). This is a valuable record, showing the child's progress, as marks are unable to do. One teacher's Folder format: frontcover carries a growing 'Contents', of topics completed; the inside-front carries the child's growing list of 'Topics I Might Write About'; and the inside-back carries the child's list of 'Things I Can Do' (often noted in conference), not only mechanical skills but what the child sees as new abilities ('I told a joke', 'I wrote a story about space', etc.).

These children are revising earlier drafts. Their intention is to achieve polished writing which can be 'published' as a book for the classroom library.

3. Process

In the 1970s a big change began to come over our understanding of how-writing-happens. As a result, we now know it is futile to say, 'Here is your topic; write about it and I will collect your writing and mark it.' That, the traditional 'composition' method, was a 'one-shot act'. Now we see that writing is a *process:* facing a problem, we start to get ideas and mental pictures; we may talk about the problem and at length feel ready to write; perhaps we then write a draft, but, usually finding it patchy, we turn to polishing till we get it right. This, with infinite variations, suggests the nature of 'process'.

- 'Writing only truly becomes writing in revision.' (D.G.)
- In the past, when a child wrote poorly (as nearly everyone does in a first draft), the writing was taken up and marked vividly in red, leaving the child to conclude, 'I can't write, I hate writing' . . . then on to another piece, another failure. But now, *in conference,* a teacher says, 'You've finished your first draft. Good. Read it to me and we'll see if your story tells me what you want it to say.' If it is a muddle or if it leaves out vital information, the teacher says, 'Read that again' or 'Listen to me read it' or 'Tell me about that bit' — the confusion is sorted out and the child knows what to rearrange or add.
- Of course, revision does not become a concern until children have an elementary control of the 'code'; but spontaneously they begin early to change a letter or a word because they have a developing sense of exactness. (Our insistence on neatness at this stage can inhibit their tendency to revise.)
- For most beginning writers, the first step of 'process' isn't writing but drawing. They may draw for a time before deciding what they want to write about. Or, having chosen a topic, they may draw to clarify the ideas in the mind and only then start to write. Some children, having drawn and then written a draft, may even approach revision by first revising the drawing and only then proceeding to revise the draft.
- By degrees the child's need to draw diminishes and may even disappear altogether (perhaps after a year). It has become internalised. Presumably the child goes on doing some mental-picturing as an early part of the writing process, but without needing to get the picture onto paper.
- Typically, small children are at first relatively indifferent to what readers think of their writing, but this gradually gives way to frustration and self-doubt: writing seems to grow in difficulty — the difficulty of saying enough to satisfy critical readers, of using punctuation effectively, etc. Conferences are more than ever vital here — to lend support in revising the often threadbare first draft.

What revision must be mastered? How does publication help?

- A first draft is usually slight, over-general, rough.
- The revision part of the process is an upbuilding, an injection of points omitted, linkages, dramatic interest, and 'specifics'.
- In the early stages, revision tends to be limited to making additions at the beginning and end only; later, children learn to revise what comes between.

- 'Young writers need to learn a whole repertoire for messing up their first draft as they change pieces, insert, take out, reorganise. When children stop erasing and instead cross out, draw lines and arrows, or change handwriting from careful printing to a functional scrawl (knowing this to be only a draft) they show awareness that draft writing is temporary, malleable, meant to be changed.' (D.G.)
- Many teachers adopt this system: when 4-5 pieces have been written, the child is asked to choose one for special revision and 'publication'. (Some incidental revision will already have taken place on the 4-5 pieces partly on the child's initiative, partly because of the teacher's encouragement during conferences.) Other forms of publication are of course possible.
- The quantity and quality of revision-for-publication expected by the teacher varies from child to child. The teacher sets up a strong expectation for the classroom as a whole, but may see one careful revision as sufficient for some children while firmly prompting others to carry out more. A treasured minority voluntarily carry out many revisions.
- N.B. Every person has a unique writing 'process'. One of the fascinations of being a writing teacher lies in noticing and nurturing the varieties of process. For example, some children write a draft without stopping and they can be encouraged to read back and revise, others revise sentence by sentence while writing their first draft and they can be encouraged to experiment with a more free-flowing approach.
- 'Publication' means at its broadest, any reading or display of a child's writing at any stage; however, experience has shown that the interest of most children is especially aroused by 'publication as a book'.
- The 'book' is either typed for the child (large letters if possible) or carefully handwritten by the child; the child illustrates it and staples or glues it into hard covers which are then attractively designed.
- Shelved in the classroom (or school) library the children's published 'books' are not only a stimulus to further writing by the authors but a highly significant reading resource for the whole class.

4. Time

Writing is important; it is important in every year of school learning and in careers and social life beyond school. Fully realising this, the conference approach urges the necessity of providing time for writing *every day*. The case for doing so is unanswerable.

Language always has to be more learned than taught; more learned-by-doing than by being-taught-about. And learning to write is no exception. It needs daily practice in the same way as learning to talk needed it. But whereas every child chattered daily as a natural process, school must provide the child with daily opportunities to write. Not just time for exercises on vocabulary, syntax and grammar — which only look after the surface 'mechanics' — but time to write originally, composing ideas about experience.

After years of relative neglect, writing is rapidly acquiring equal status with reading. Justly so, for reading and writing are equal sides

BREAK DOWN
THE BARRIERS

Writing partners often stimulate and help each other. In doing so they ease the pressure on the teacher.

of the coin of literacy. Moreover, given a chance, they interweave and reinforce each other: while writing, we go back repeatedly over what we have written so far, doing a great deal of incidental reading; and while reading, we hear the rhythms and sequences of 'words on paper', so that our capacity for writing benefits. No wonder some teachers are now saying, 'The best way to teach reading is to get children writing,' and others are saying, 'A love of reading is the best way to foster a love of writing'.

- Teachers using the conference approach try to provide a writing session of *at least* half an hour a day. Many, in fact, provide somewhat longer sessions, usually early in the day when the children are fresh—and, if possible, in the first period of the morning so that some mothers, having brought their children to school, can remain to assist with the writing session.
- The sessions are fully devoted to original writing. Teaching of 'mechanics' takes place within individual conferences. The sessions are marked by expectation on the teacher's part that children will engage wholeheartedly in their writing.
- Some teachers have thrown out the 'segmented timetable' in favour of integrated programming, largely based on writing.
- A Year 2 example: every morning there is a session of writing, 'out of which all other language activities emerge'. (Judith Egan)

- A Year 6 example: children do much of their writing about 'content subjects', yet the teacher finds that they can retain 'ownership' here as they did in their earlier self-chosen personal writing; they now have the confidence, inspired by years of conferencing, to choose their own topics and subject-matter within subject limits that are only broadly prescribed by the teacher and curriculum. (Provided by D.G.)

Finally . . .

A Classroom Writing Community. Writing, conferencing, publishing, sharing—these activities produce a strong sense of mutually supportive *community,* which 'adds a learning-force to the teaching-force' (D.G.). At many points the children are learning faster from each other than from the advice and instruction of the teacher. One specially valuable whole-class activity which reinforces all the individualisation and partnering is a daily 'share meeting' of about 10 minutes in which the class hears two or three pieces of writing and makes some comments—this is the writing community deliberating!

Ten Questions Teachers Ask About the 'Conference Approach'

(a) 'Conference Approach'? I don't use the term easily. Can't we find an alternative?

Teachers have tried alternatives. I have heard: 'process approach', 'process-conference approach', 'individualised approach', 'discussion approach', 'talk-write approach', and 'Donald Graves approach'. But none has proved fully satisfactory. Graves himself, the least dogmatic of men, doesn't insist on any particular term. ('Down with nominalism!' he shouted at a Sydney meeting in 1980. 'Education is too hung-up on undeservedly sacred terms which stop teachers thinking about underlying meaning.')

When I wrote to Graves about the alien sound of 'conference' for some Australian teachers, he replied that there might be a 'semantic-cultural' barrier: 'The word isn't a problem in the U.S., for it is used quite broadly in the culture. If the word stands in your way, then invent one that is more suitable to your setting.'

So the issue is wide open. Meanwhile, I find that after initially feeling uncomfortable with it, teachers grow accustomed to 'conference' as a noun (or adjective, as in 'conference approach'), though like myself they have continuing qualms about its use as a participle or gerund ('conferencing') and even more so as a verb ('We conferenced together'!). Why not say 'conferred' or just plain 'talked'? . . . Let's keep thinking. Meanwhile the term 'conference approach' has the widest currency—because, surely, the conference is the most distinctive single feature of the whole approach.

(b) Isn't this approach just an elaborate way of individualising writing?

Certainly it achieves a remarkably high level of individualisation—which you must agree is desirable. I don't know another approach that achieves more.

But it is a different individualisation from that of commercial kits which have the children working separately on cards *all the time.* In contrast to such inhuman dullness, the conference approach balances the individualisation with many kinds of *sharing*—through the child-and-teacher conferences, peer conferences, whole-class 'share sessions', encouragement of 'writing partners', a workshop environment in which 'work talk' is natural, and the overall spirit of an animated 'writing community' . . . Individualisation and co-operation keep interweaving all the time.

(c) Fads come and go. Isn't the conference approach just the latest?

There's more to the approach than novelty. It is free of gimmicks. It is not dependent on a commercial kit or a textbook-with-blanks. It is intensely classroom-practical, shaped by a vast amount of trialling. And it has a built-in flexibility which permits adjustment to each child, each teacher, each classroom environment, even each topic.

Teachers sometimes prefer to conduct conferences from their own table. A small queue usually forms. At other times they move among the writers.

That is a big claim, but evidence is easy to find. I would in fact argue that the emergence of this approach was inevitable. It represents a convergence of hitherto separate trends that had been developing—chiefly during the sixties and seventies—in the understanding of writing, learning and teaching. The historic role of Donald Graves and his co-researchers has been to divine a relationship between these trends, to weave the trends together, and to offer an immediately workable 'approach'—moreover, to do so in an admirably non-dogmatic way which leaves this approach open to absorbing every new, practical finding in further writing research.

Take what I have called the four 'pillars' of the conference approach: conferences, 'ownership', writing as process, and time for original writing. Each can be shown to be a natural enough element in a writing program. Nothing faddish or repellently theoretical about any of them! Combined in a mix that suits whatever local climate, the approach works. Graves' earlier Ford Foundation research had shown him that too many schools across America, in the name of teaching writing, were substituting language exercises for original prose composition itself. He declared: 'The problem with writing is not spelling, punctuation, grammar, and handwriting. The problem with writing is no writing' (*Language Arts*, N.C.T.E., May, 1978, p.635). The Ford study produced the conclusion that if American children wrote only one paper a week they would certainly become writers above the national average.

Now, the conference approach guarantees just such a *quantity* of writing quite incidentally. To that extent it is a practical recipe for considerable improvement over what we have accepted as the 'normal' level for too long. But it promises to achieve much more: to make competent, self-reliant writers of all the children in the classrooms where it is practised, with fringe benefits in improved reading and improved thinking.

(d) I don't find that teaching is any easier under the conference approach. Should it be?

Probably not. But it is always filled with interest and a sense of purpose. Of course, good classroom management is called for. The teachers who are most at home with the approach seem to operate from a strong 'intention' that the writing time will be full of business. They allocate enough time to ensure an unhurried pace and usually timetable the writing for early in the day when minds are fresh.

Some teachers have all the children writing at the one time, others prefer to use rotating learning areas (e.g. writing, reading, listening, drama, science, maths, art-craft). Some try to handle conference problems as they spontaneously arise, others program 8-10 children for conference every day.

All teachers value the 'tools' of the writing session—not only the provision of plenty of writing and drawing implements but also erasers, paper of various sizes, books, dictionaries, charts, and, for young ones, 'reference words' labelling classroom objects. They experiment with lined and unlined paper, looseleaf and bound writing

Against a background of their 'published' stories, this group is visited by the teacher, who confers with anyone who needs help.

books, various modes of 'publication', and various audiences. Some of them experiment too with routines, e.g. they try the settling effect of 10-15 minutes reading before writing, or a short talk or 'share' session before writing, or four minutes of 'free' or 'speed' writing before the writing session proper.

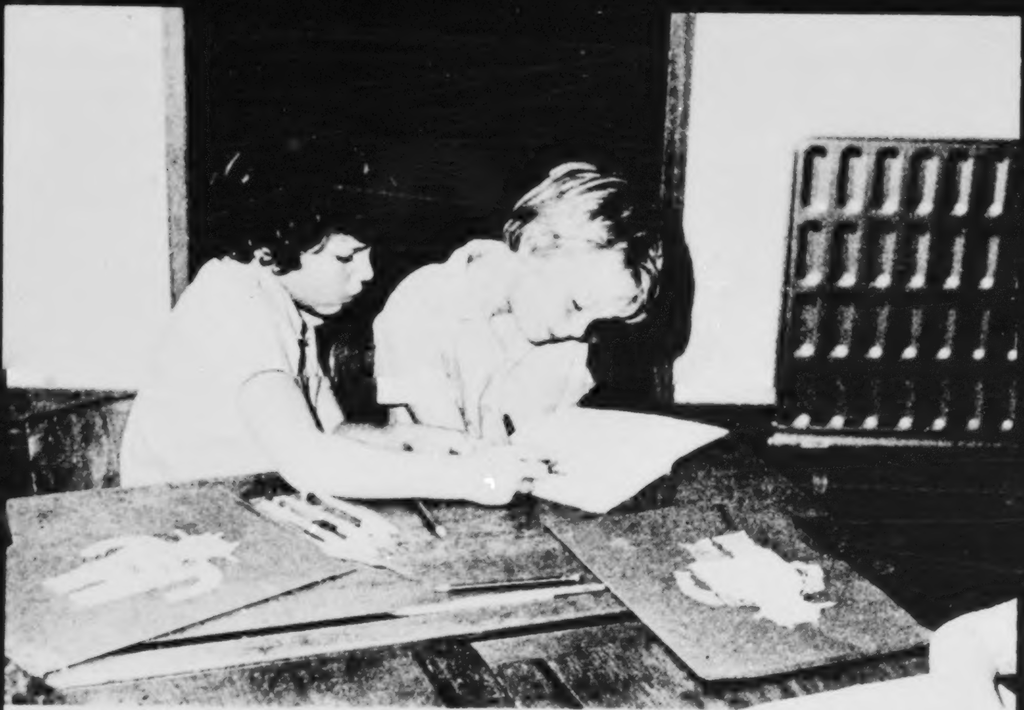
(e) What frequency of conferences for each child? I've used the conference approach for three months but I get concerned when told that all of a child's needs for spelling, punctuation, syntax, grammar and even phonics can be satisfied by one-to-one conferencing, without any need for whole-class exercises.

A teacher sent the question to Donald Graves and received this reply:

'I can never speak of a set frequency. Some children need conferences daily, some only fortnightly; some need thirty seconds, some may occasionally need twenty minutes.

'The teaching of all those elements of writing (spelling, etc.) does not depend narrowly on what the teacher says to the child within the conferences, significant though that is. We must not forget all the other factors that are operating for excellence in the classroom, factors of teamwork, peer emulation, children helping other children, the child taking responsibility, the class spirit, and so on.

'The skills are developed over a long time and many do not necessarily came from direct teaching. The timing of a skill is



The children's seriousness about one another's writing often surprises the visitor. They read and respond both before and after completion of work.

everything. Think of the number of times children are taught inverted commas from age nine through nineteen. In the past the timing has often been poor and the child kept getting taught the same thing over and over again, but ineffectually.

'Conference success is totally dependent on the broader ecology of the classroom. As teachers gain experience with conferences they become more and more insightful; they gain in confidence and they give more and more responsibility to the children. It does take more than a few months of conferencing . . . but it will come.'

(f) I'm a Year 1 teacher and I've cultivated topic-choice among my children for six months, with considerable success. But I'm worried. The majority of topics are about neither personal-experience nor fictional stories. The preference is for description and how-to topics. How can I move my children to better topics?

Don't worry. Let time, experience and writing lead the children to ever-widening interests. If they are choosing their topics and are writing with enthusiasm there need be no search for 'better topics' at this stage. The present topics are now the best.

One researcher, Susan Sowers, has tested the widespread supposition that first-graders will naturally write 'narrative'—and she finds it wanting. Non-narrative was clearly favoured early in the year by her class, in a ratio of 23:13. She defined narrative simply as any piece that is chronologically ordered. Non-narrative is typically titled 'All About . . .'; it is often only an inventory or listing of knowledge; other examples can be strongly emotional ('I like/love') and self-expressive in function. However, after nearly a year, the ratio began to reverse: narrative pieces were becoming more common.

In trying to account for this shift, we need to notice a number of factors that are at work in, roughly, the 5-7 age range. First, as Marie Clay has observed, 5 year olds spontaneously arrange or order things they learn (e.g. letters, numbers, words, facts); so, to this extent, non-narrative is 'natural'. Second, narrative may not be either natural or easy to write; it is an abstraction, the making of a story with elements which are consciously *selected* from otherwise relatively chaotic events —in short, narrative is a skill or craft that has to be learned. Third, not only time is needed for acquiring narrative skill but a writer also needs to feel an external stimulus or demand. Young children seem at first to be immune to all such demands. They begin by choosing non-narrative, regardless of what anyone might wish. However, in Year 1 their sensitivity to peer response grows. There is a dawning realisation that *readers prefer stories*. Parallel with this, these apprentice writers are reading and discussing scores of stories and thus learning how they are done. Beyond Year 1, therefore, narrative is likely to predominate. But it should not be promoted to the exclusion of other forms of writing (explanation, how-to, description, etc.). Fluency in a variety of forms is desirable. Fortunately, there is no need for the teacher to force the pace. The conference classroom's 'writing community' sets up its own natural pressures for change, variety and growth.

(g) Does it really matter who chooses the writing topic? I pride myself on setting interesting topics. At times I've asked classes to choose their own topics and only a few children have seemed to like doing so. Many choose dull topics compared to mine.

The point is to start children towards self-reliance as learners. Here is how Donald Graves answered a question similar to yours.

'At first, children do come up with dull topics and do make poor choices. It takes a good while before teachers and children can come up with the best topic the child can use. Choosing a topic is a learning situation. Now, it is true, I can come up with a pretty jazzy topic that will release some good things from children. Sadly, that makes them think I am the only one who can release this—and their dependency begins.

'Most children at first don't believe that anything of interest has happened to them. Or rather this is true of older children. It is much less a problem for young ones; given the chance early, they catch on quickly. Of course I don't mean that all of them on any day can instantly invent a topic. It's a human problem and therefore full of variables.

'I remember when a class of mainly 8 year olds began the approach. I would guess that it took about three months for 80% of them to be writing about topics of their own choosing that reach into the heart of what a child knows. Note that some 20% of them hadn't pulled it off. Topic choosing is a lifetime skill. Ask any professional writer. But the importance of learning the topic-choosing process is critical . . .' (See p. 59 for a detailed discussion of topic choice.)

(h) I can't imagine children revising their writing as much as the conference approach seems to expect. Do they willingly do so?

Some revision *is* basic—because revision is part of the character of writing itself. Scarcely ever does writing spring forth in polished style. But just how much revision actually takes place will depend on two main factors: the teacher's conviction about the role of revision in the writing process, and the children's interest in their writing.

Revision begins to be acceptable to children when they voluntarily choose their own topics. The choosing serves to involve them in working out how to *say* effectively what they *feel* about something that is of importance to them. ('I keep on thinking of better ways to say it,' says 9 year old Greta as she revises; and 10 year old Andrew mutters, 'I'm making it better so it says what I really want to say.') Of course beginners aren't asked to revise; nor are Year 1 children pressed to do so, though many carry out elementary revision chiefly at the time of the first writing, either while writing or after reading it back (aloud or sub-audibly). It is often just a changed spelling, the crossing out of an unwanted word, the insertion of a word left out, or the substitution of a better word. Later the revision grows in sophistication; perhaps there is a full redrafting, or several—particularly when there is a prospect of 'publication'.

Around age nine, children respond to the idea of trying out 'leads' or openings. This is a special form of revision. It is best done when the topic is conceived. 'Try out a few different leads,' says the teacher. 'Bring them to a conference and we'll consider them.' The child brings 3-4 leads, each usually representing a different point-of-view. The most successful will probably be one that brings momentum or drama to the piece.

(i) The conference approach is a force for integration — what does this mean?

The conference approach features experiences rather than exercises. An experience is a meaningful (or 'integrated') whole, whereas an exercise is a relatively meaningless part. If knowledge and skills are continually served up in separate bits called exercises, children have great difficulty putting the bits together when life demands whole, meaningful writing of them.

This is the problem the old 'segmented timetable' never solved—a segment on spelling, the next on phonics, the next on grammar, and so on . . . unrelated exercises, bits and pieces, all rather lifeless and dull. A timetable made up of such exercises makes little sense. Indeed the only exercises that really make sense to a child are those that show how to overcome a weakness which has appeared in the handling of a current experience.

Writing, when it is original composition 'owned' by the child, becomes a concentrated effort to reflect on experience — it is *thinking* of a careful kind which tries to make something of the experience. In revision it can become the most consistently deep, exacting and polished thinking-and-communicating an individual is capable of. In distinction from the fragmentariness of exercises, it strives to create a unified, integrated whole by taking in all the significant sides of an experience. As novelist Anne Morrow Lindbergh saw it: 'Writing is thinking. It is more than living, for it is being conscious of living . . . An experience isn't finished until it's written.'

So the kind of school writing that should be valued most of all is the individual child's original composition. The conference approach stresses choice of topic by the child in order to ensure that the child 'owns' the piece, is self-motivated, and will reach voluntarily for new ideas, sentence patterns, vocabulary and spelling—in short, ensure that the child will *make* the learning instead of passively *receiving* it.

The conference approach brings home to teachers a realisation of the integrative power of writing. Many teachers then feel impelled to risk a great alteration of their curriculum. They make provision for original writing every day (or almost every day). They allot as much time to this writing as to reading and maths. (At long last the 3Rs are equalised!) The extra time may come from the previous formal language lessons of the superseded segmented timetable. Now all the problems of spelling, punctuation, handwriting, sentence structure and grammar arise *integrally* within the whole, meaningful pieces of writing of each child. Requisite skills are confronted and improved in action, any deficiencies being discussed in conference—no longer skills in abstract but skills at the individual child's point of presently felt need.

From the United States comes this report of research:[1]

> Atkinson teachers take time from other subjects and give it to writing because they know writing offers a context for learning these other skills. 'Writing has changed the whole curriculum,' Mrs Howard says. 'Last year I divided language into little parts—punctuation, spelling, reading, letter writing. I made up class lessons for everything and spent my time trying to convince the children workbooks were important.' Now Mrs Howard teaches these skills during writing conferences.
>
> A study funded by the National Institute of Education shows that Mrs Howard's children are learning them more effectively than if they were doing drills, workbook exercises and language lessons. Researcher Lucy McCormick Calkins found that although Mrs Howard's third graders have no formal instruction in punctuation, they can define/explain an average of twice as many kinds of punctuation as can children in a third grade across the hall where writing is rare but punctuation is taught through daily classwork and drills.

The same researcher reports the enthusiasm of parents for the progress their first grade children are making *in reading*. When they enquire what reading program has wrought such wonders, the teacher replies: 'Writing!'

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[1] Lucy McCormick Calkins, 'Writing Taps a New Energy Source', in *Donald Graves in Australia*, ed. R.D. Walshe (P.E.T.A. 1981), p.51.

(j) How does the conference approach evaluate the children's development?

It does not prescribe any set method. After all, the ingenuity of teachers has given rise to endless methods of assessing and evaluating, and any of these might be used.

Perhaps the two features of the approach most relevant to any question of evaluation are: first, that regular, frequent one-to-one conferencing gives the teacher an incomparable knowledge of every child's strengths, weaknesses and rate of progress (no form of testing can reveal this!); second, that the children are engaged daily on full, original writing, with all the benefits this brings in learning to write, in contrast to the arid substitutes for writing beloved of testers—vocabulary and sentence correction exercises, grammar exercises, comprehension exercises, and so on.

So the children are really writing, and the teacher has an intimate knowledge of every child's current abilities. The one record that the conference approach does insist on is an effective form of Writing Folder, the accumulating collection-cum-record of the child's writing. It contains all the writing that has been polished and it may also contain pieces that have been taken only to first draft (they might be worked on further at a later stage). Parents can be shown the work in the Folder and will thus observe the development. The teacher can of course turn to the Folder at any time to analyse patterns of change or rigidity in a child's performance.

Beyond this, the conference approach would not make any specific recommendation. Some teachers keep an anecdotal record or 'profile' of each child. Others use skills checklists. Others are obliged by the school system to assign a numerical mark or letter-grade to the thousand-fold complexity of the writing performance. And others value ongoing self-evaluation by the child (one popular practice here is the keeping of a 'Things I Can Do' section in the Writing Folder, usually a full page on the inside-back cover).

Some teachers report the special usefulness of the following record for demonstrating the child's progress to parents or the principal: for each of the three terms in the school year, carefully choose, in consultation with the child, three pieces of polished writing (handwritten, prior to any 'publication as a book'), and keep these together in a separate folder which is always ready for inspection.

PART V

Ten Questions Teachers Ask

WRITING IN LEARNING

Question 1

'How important is writing in school learning?'

Notable changes of attitude to writing are appearing in the 1980s all over the English-speaking world. In many places, writing is becoming a curriculum priority, bringing to an end the long period in which it was the Cinderella of the 3Rs. There is now more research into writing than ever before, more space for it in teaching journals, more provision for it in in-service courses, and even a beginning of more time for it in classrooms.

How are these changes to be explained? In fact they are only early results of many new currents of interest in writing which emerged in the 1970s. The strength of the interest can be illustrated by giving instances of the three most significant of these new currents (drawn from the largest English-speaking country):

- *Writing is important.* There is a rising public and educational awareness that writing is important:

  > '. . . a wave of writing reform is sweeping through schools, colleges and businesses all over the United States,' reports *Time* magazine, 19 May, 1980. It is more than reform, says a feature writer in a leading educational journal: '. . . a *renaissance* is precisely what composition as an academic subject is experiencing . . . More and more, educators and laypeople are coming to see that writing will be essential in the highly technological world of tomorrow.' (*Phi Delta Kappan*, February, 1981, p.417)

- *Writing can be successfully taught to all.* New, highly successful methods of teaching writing are being demonstrated, and almost all of them are based on new understanding of the nature of the writing 'process':

  > The most important development in the teaching of writing during the seventies was the growing acceptance of the concept of process, that the complex act of writing could not be understood by retrospective analysis of a completed piece of writing, but only by studying — and teaching — the entire process of making: rehearsing, drafting, and revising. (Donald M. Murray, in *Language Arts*, N.C.T.E., May 1980)

- *Writing is a mode of learning, not just an instrument.* The previous low curriculum status of writing, relegated as it was to being the recording and examining instrument of the school subjects, is coming to an end as writing is increasingly seen to be also a significant mode of learning:

> Writing represents a unique mode of learning — not merely valuable, not merely special, but unique . . . Writing serves learning uniquely because writing as process and product possesses a cluster of attributes that correspond uniquely to certain powerful learning strategies. (Janet Emig, in *College Composition and Communication*, N.C.T.E., May 1977)

These three currents, manifesting in Australia in the late seventies, have flowed into a powerful confluence in the early eighties. They are compelling our attention to the question, *How important is writing in school learning?* The purpose of this chapter is to show: that an answer needs to be made urgently; that the broad answer can only be, *crucially important*; that educational decision-makers, particularly principals and teachers, must therefore give writing more time and attention; and that only writing, inseparably joined with reading, can occupy the central role in school learning.

More than a Skill, more than an Instrument

Until recently the schools showed little interest in writing as a mode of thinking and learning. The traditional school saw it as a mechanical skill, taught initially by copying and repetition and thereafter developed by a weekly or fortnightly exercise ('composition') in the form of a one-off draft on a prescribed topic, an unrevised piece of writing not intended for real readers and only checked for surface correctness by the teacher. Outside of such exercises the school used writing 'instrumentally', that is, to record information in the subject areas and test its memorisation . . . This traditional model has been modifying slowly throughout the century but many elements of it can still be recognised alongside more enlightened teaching.

By contrast we now perceive that writing is more than a mechanical skill and more than an instrument. As process, it can be a powerful way of learning; as product, it can accumulate learning and make further review, extension and deepening of learning possible. Here are some of the attributes of writing as a mode of learning.

Attributes of Writing as a Mode of Learning

.. Writing is thinking, a special form of thinking whose distinctiveness is suggested by 'think-write' or 'write-think';

.. it is a readily available means of thoughtful composing, dependent only on the inexpensive technology of pen, paper and eraser;

.. it is a cheap yet effective how-to-think course, offering results which compare favourably with those from specific 'clear-thinking' courses;

.. it is thinking made visible, a clarification of 'inner-speech', by setting it out on a page where it can be scrutinised;

.. it is, like talk, primarily active, originative thinking, as compared to reading and listening which are primarily receptive;

.. it is a powerful means of focusing thinking and so helping thought to clarify; indeed it is an unrivalled means of 'concentrating';

.. it is also a means of holding more data in view, for selection, association and arrangement, than is otherwise possible;

.. it is an individual ('lonely') activity, free of social distraction and therefore supportive of concentration;

.. it is characteristically a slower, more deliberative form of thinking than talk, allowing time to be careful;

- it is flexible as to time, enabling individuals to choose their own pace, each lingering at needful points in the process;
- it is a specific form of the creative process (problem — incubation — illumination — verification — expression);
- it is therefore a process which corresponds closely to the decision-making, problem-solving, and scientific processes;
- it is therefore also an important form of 'discovery learning' ('Writing is hauling in a long line from the depths to find out what things are strung to it': James Moffett);
- it is thinking which has a built-in power of 'lateral thinking' (OED: 'seeking to solve problems by unorthodox or apparently illogical methods'), e.g. 'writing rebels against intent' (D. M. Murray);
- it is a discipline added to reflective thought, insofar as the written piece shows up carelessness, gaps, obscurities, inconsistencies;
- it is a powerful marshalling of three major ways of dealing with experience — doing, depicting, restating; that is, writing uses simultaneously hand, eye and brain to select — connect — arrange and so express a personal version of the manifold impressions of an 'experience';
- it is, for many reasons, *a deeper kind of thinking* than is possible when reflecting or talking, but especially because it allows for stages in the growth and revision of thinking: a pre-writing gathering of ideas; a trial drafting; and a series of revisions until the writing is clear for readers;
- it is a permanent record and so it can be returned to at any time, even after its content has been forgotten;
- it is an accumulating record, which encourages progression by making it easy to check past statements and so remain consistent;
- it is a process with an efficient built-in feedback system in that it regularly provides output which can be monitored, as soon as written, to determine whether improved input is needed;
- it is thinking that can be put aside, returned to in a more objective frame of mind, and subjected to criticism;
- it is a force for self-reliant thinking, obliging the writer to make up his or her own mind, individually, responsibly;
- it is a means of self-exploring which can achieve revealing insights, e.g. through a journal or free writing or 'experience writing';
- it is therapy when used in psychotherapy either to write directly or indirectly about one's neurosis (indirectly through poetry, diary, free writing, or letters);
- it is therapeutic anyway, insofar as writing is a 'gathering' or 'composing' not only of a subject but also of the writer's thoughts and feelings, so that a regular quantity of personal-experience writing contributes to children's mental health;
- it is the language mode that can make full use of the other modes, talking, listening and reading, taking what they have to offer and pressing on further;
- it is the thinking exercise which enables a learner to work out exactly how much has been understood in any complex learning situation ('How do I know what I think, till I see what I write?');

.. it is integrative thinking, because it strongly involves the brain's two hemispheres (*left,* language, analytical; *right,* pattern, picture, intuitional) and because its strong linear-connective functions tend to cut across subject boundaries;

.. it is a 'deeper kind of thinking' that is available across the curriculum; therefore, improving the craft of writing means improving the quality of learning across the curriculum;

.. it is, finally, reading; in other words, writing is a particular kind of thinking *process* which issues in a particular *product,* reading. This is the right note on which to climax discussion of the significance of writing in learning — with writing and reading tied together. For as science fiction writer Ray Bradbury says

> Our culture 100 years from now will stand or fall on our ability to read and write well. Will we still have books? Yes! Because books and reading and writing are the only ways to achieve disciplined thinking. (*S.M.H.,* 14/7/1979)

The list adds up impressively! It shows writing to be at once more comprehensive and more deep-going than any other mode of learning. In fact, no list of attributes of any other learning mode can nearly equal this. The list establishes not just the importance but the centrality of writing in school learning.

- *Qualifications*

Is 'central' the best word? Or 'core' or 'key' or 'basic'? It does not matter so long as writing is lodged at the heart of the school learning enterprise. Together, of course, with reading. Writing-reading . . . in that order, because writing, as we have observed, is primarily active, originative, expressive. Reading too *should be* active and especially critical, but mostly it is not *primarily* so.

The list's attributes of writing are limited to 30 in order not to strain the reader's attention. Others could be found, but the main ones are surely included. Of course there is an unavoidable 'can be' factor here: writing *can be* all these valuable things for learning if schools realise the extent of its potential.

Also unavoidable is the list's concentration on writing to the exclusion of other 'modes of learning', particularly reflecting, talking, listening, reading, calculating, manipulating, painting, dancing, singing. Obviously they too are important learning modes. Indeed it is in the interests of better writing that their claims should not be overlooked. A leading teacher of writing, Donald Graves, has issued the most salutary reminder of the need for a balanced approach, based on the findings of his US survey of conditions favourable to writing:

> Where writing flourished, it was but one of many forms of expression. Once personal expression was valued it popped up in many areas; it could not be contained by writing alone. Nor did writing succeed if it was but one form of expression. Drama, storytelling, music, painting, choral speaking, crafts of all sorts, movement and dance were in evidence . . . (*Language Arts,* N.C.T.E., May, 1978)

Nevertheless, in the context of today's school learning, with its preponderance of literate-cognitive subject matter, there is no room left to doubt that writing-reading has to occupy the central position.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WRITING

Question 2

'How important is writing in today's world?'

It certainly is important; in fact more important than it has ever been. Here are six major reasons why anyone who can't write fluently and correctly is a disadvantaged human being.

1. Important for succeeding in education. We can say to the child, 'You can see that writing is important in so many areas of the primary school; well, it is absolutely important also in almost every subject you will do in the secondary school. In fact you can only pass the important secondary exams through the point of your pen — most subjects require essay-answers. And writing remains quite basically important when you go on to a tech., a college, or a university. Do you realise too that nowadays education is lifelong? Everyone goes on doing courses of various kinds throughout life — and writing is a passport to success in most of them.'

2. Important as a way of learning. Writing is much more than 'skills' (of sentence-making, punctuating, paragraphing, etc.). It is an indispensable learning activity. At many points we simply wouldn't learn, or wouldn't learn well, if we didn't write. Writing is mankind's fantastic invention for improving on the muddle of thoughts that crowd our heads: it is the means by which we select the best thoughts, record them, cull them, arrange them, and then present them clearly to a reader. It enables us to reach *the clearest, deepest understanding of which we are capable.* As a university man put it: 'Only when spelling out thoughts on paper do I become fully aware of the gaps, obscurities and inconsistencies that have hitherto been lurking undetected in my thinking' (*TLS,* 24/6/77). It is through writing that we work out what exactly we have learned; and, as notes, we can revise it and so deepen our *understanding* of it. This recorded and deeply understood knowledge is the kind that is most likely to become our 'frontier of learning', from which further advances will be made.

3. Important in decision-making. Much of learning takes the form of problem-solving, decision-making. We first get a problem clear by writing it out; then we can record observations, insights, guesses, hypotheses; finally we can work towards a solution by draft writing and rewriting. Listen to how important a commercial 'Personal Success Program' believes this process to be: 'Write it out: there isn't an idea in the world that can't be put down on paper . . . The mere act of writing . . . forces you to be clear . . . You can go over it again and again, correcting, polishing, improving . . .' (Nelson Doubleday).

4. Important in survival. Not only do we have to write *for* jobs, but *in* many jobs, above the first rung of the ladder, we have to command some proficiency in writing. And because nearly everyone changes jobs many times in modern life, we can never say, 'I won't need writing.'

(One of the major critics of today's schooling is the employer organisations, which declare that the writing ability of young employees is not good enough for handling the work required of them.) Moreover, the citizen is disadvantaged who can't write a protest letter or report (as consumer, ratepayer, taxpayer, defender of the environment), or write for information, or write as secretary or publicity officer of a club, and so on.

5. Important in personal development. This is even more important than the four previous utilitarian 'importances'. Writing is *composition,* a putting together of otherwise separate things; in fact, whenever children (or adults) are allowed to write about their own experiences, they engage in *an original and creative process:* they compose their ideas, feelings, fears and hopes — and so, of course, compose themselves, strengthening identity, self-image, self-reliance. This is one of the reasons why the current journal (or diary) movement in the schools is so significant. The children are reflecting, introspecting, *composing themselves* through journal writing, in the face of the disintegrative forces rampant in modern society (TV, advertising, pornography, drugs, etc.). As Karl Popper says: 'There is a kind of feedback in all human activities: in acting we always act, indirectly, upon ourselves'. To searchingly construe experience through writing is one of the best ways in which children can act for growth *upon themselves.*

6. Important in promoting literate values. In many ways the highly monopolised commercial media — television, radio, newspapers — threaten to submerge the values of literate culture which the schools have a duty to preserve and promote. These media, powerful, pervasive and often shoddy, have created what is really the mass education system of our time. They have pushed the schools into the minority position of having to struggle defensively to provide a counter-system. Against the shallow, violent, anti-intellectual, apathy-inducing values pumped out incessantly by the media, the schools need to be militantly promoting wide reading and clear writing. Reading, obviously, and no one is likely to think otherwise; but writing too, for all the reasons mentioned, and not least that it can incomparably help the individual to think, be critical, and work through to a considered attitude towards the mass culture.

So you see, there are powerful arguments for the importance of writing for each and every child. Compared to these arguments, how trivial is the view that, because we now have telephones, tape-recorders and standardised 'form-letters', writing is out of date.

Question 3

'What is the best approach to beginning writing?'

Writing is a craft, so children must learn mainly *by writing itself*. Advice and demonstrations, valuable though they can be, come second to that fact. So we must examine the many available teaching methods to find one — or an eclectic selection from several? — that is likely to provide the best framework within which the children will learn to write by writing.

Effective pre-school non-methods. Young children want to write. They clamour for opportunities. Happy the child whose parents 'teach writing' by playing at it, supplying paper and varied writing instruments, and cheerfully accompanying the child on a trip that begins around two years old with joyous scribble and meanders on through drawing to the making of letters, words, names, messages, rhymes, whatever. This child will enter school with an advanced 'beginning writing ability'.

Traditional classroom copying. Whereas the haphazard non-method of the parents made sense to the child as play-work about real interests, the tendency of many infants classrooms in years gone by was to teach writing at first by drilling children in the copying of adult models of writing. If first impressions are most important, generations of children were given the powerful first impression that school writing meant nothing but 'correct copying'. So there was laboured copying of a model alphabet, its capitals and lower case; copying of the teacher's script by tracing over it; copying of captions or short poems or inane stock sentences like 'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy white dog'; or, at best, copying of sentences which daringly left an occasional blank for the child to fill in, like 'the lazy dog had a . . . coat'.

'Keywords' and 'Organic Writing'. Some teachers rebelled against the traditional dullness. Sylvia Ashton-Warner, for instance; she describes in her inspired book *Teacher* (Secker and Warburg, 1963) how she armed her children with a 'Keywords' vocabulary and then launched them on 'Organic Writing'. Each morning each child would offer his or her own special word, such as 'Mummy', 'Daddy', 'kiss', 'frightened', 'ghost' — really 'a caption' to 'a picture in the child's mind' — which the teacher printed on a card. This the child carried around proudly, tracing over the word with a finger, learning the letters and the spelling with little effort. A collection accumulated.

Soon these 'keywords' were followed by 'organic writing', starting with attempts by the children to write out their 'keywords' for themselves and moving on to topics, self-chosen like the words, at first of sentence-length and then of brief story-length: 'After a while, as their capacity increases, they write two sentences about themselves and their lives, then three, until six-year-olds are writing half a page and seven-year-olds a page or more a day . . .' (p.52). With 'scarcely any teaching', she says, they transferred the whole question of spelling, word study and composition 'into the vent of creativity'. In each day's writing session the teacher worked with, ideally, eight children (never more than twelve) while the rest of the class were 'self-dependent in the development period'. The aim was to work up their topics for 'publication' as pupil-made books, which became a significant classroom reading resource.

Scribing and 'Language-Experience'. When Sylvia Ashton-Warner wrote down the children's spoken 'keywords', she was 'scribing'. Other teachers scribe whole sentences or stories. Or parent aides or older children do so. The well-known Language-Experience approach[1] has popularised the practice of gathering the children around a large pegged-up sheet of paper on which the teacher scribes an experience or story dictated by a child or by the class collectively. This is usually a vivid interaction in which there is talking, listening, writing (scribing), and reading. The teacher, pointing to each word, reads and re-reads the piece until the children too can 'read' it. The scribing method, with infinite variations, obviously helps. Its value for reading is considerable, but is it as valuable for teaching writing? Critics point to the relative passivity of the children while the teacher performs so easily what must seem to many of them the overwhelmingly difficult task of producing instantly correct writing.

'Breakthrough to Literacy'. While Sylvia Ashton-Warner scribed 'keywords' originated by her children, the commercial 'Breakthrough' kit more mechanically presents children with ready-made, printed — in effect, scribed — letters and words on card and requires them to be combined to make sentences. (The teacher may scribe extra words asked for by the children, but the need to wait for the teacher's assistance discourages this.) In the best use of 'Breakthrough' there is a 'language-experience' element: the teacher urges the children to compose sentences about their experiences. More often, alas, children mechanically put together sentences of the 'I go with my father to the shop' variety; the contrived sentences result from mere juggling of words from their existing collection. The mechanics of the system do little to encourage original expression or experimentation. The onus is thrown onto the teacher, instead of the child, to strive for sentence-making that is concerned with real experiences.

From scribble to script. Marie Clay's *What Did I Write?* is a splendid study of children's progression from the scribble-and-draw of the very young to readable writing in the first year of school (Heinemann Education, Auckland, 1975). She builds on recent research which suggests that 'children of five years learn faster if they are able to organise for themselves a sequence of movements . . .' (p.14) — that is, if the emphasis of the early writing program is on largely 'self-directed activity' rather than on tracing, copying and direction from the teacher.

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[1] See, for example, *The Language-Experience Approach to the Teaching of Reading*, by Russell G. Stauffer (Harper and Row, 1970).

Her own research reveals that 'when children are left free to write they seldom copy and more often invent' (p.43). An important observation! Provided a child has acquired a small number of letters, whether from parents, teachers or peers, there is a natural urge to go on and rapidly acquire more. The game of mastering over 60 shapes — 52 caps/lower letters and about 10 punctuation symbols — can be absorbing provided the child is not rushed or over-corrected. If the teacher fosters exploration and invention of scripting at the same time as the child is writing up real interests, then this confident early involvement in writing is likely to flow on to later efforts in prose writing.

By contrast an 'exercise' approach can be deadening, as when 'adult logic' prescribes a teaching sequence of letters first, words second, phrases third, sentences fourth, paragraphs . . . Marie Clay can find no fixed sequence by which all children *learn:* 'What one child discovers about print at 4:11 another equally intelligent child may not learn until 6:0'. The point is that not the mechanics of the writing code but a message is uppermost for a self-active child — 'How can I express this meaning?' So, in each piece of writing, the child will work on all levels — alphabet, spelling, punctuation, syntax, collection of ideas, their arrangement, and a tone likely to persuade the particular audience. Confirmation of this view comes from research into 'invented spelling'.

'Invented Spelling'. In the evolution of our species, writing had a late emergence after millennia of scribble and drawing on rocks and cave walls. Similarly, in each child's development, writing only begins to emerge years after the scribble that appears around age two. Unless forced artificially into an adult model, a child's early efforts at spelling will be predictably primitive — impressionistic, abbreviated and, by adult standards, full of 'mistakes'. But through contact with parents, teacher and peers, and through the influence of 'the writing all around us' — ads, labels, newspapers, books — the child's fumbling spelling will quickly refine and become legible to readers.

This view of self-active early development in spelling/writing is increasingly termed 'invented spelling'. A pioneer in its research is Glenda Bissex who tracked the progress of her son Paul in learning to write and read along this path *(GNYS AT WRK*, Harvard University Press, 1980). Donald Graves calls it 'the most natural path imaginable'. He and his colleagues in the University of New Hampshire's Writing Process Laboratory — a classroom research project — have tested the views of Bissex and others and they write enthusiastically of the results.[2]

Graves had found that about ninety per cent of children come to school believing they can write, compared to only fifteen per cent who believe they can read. So why should writing be postponed till children have a grip on reading? Without fuss, one of the New Hampshire teachers asked her children to 'Write!' on their first day — and they all did. They scribbled or drew or scrawled letters, words or names, and a few could already manage sentences. Each revealed thus his or her beginning level of understanding and control of self-chosen writing, the individual base from which to move ahead.

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[2] For a comprehensive account of 'invented spelling', see *Donald Graves in Australia*, ed. R. D. Walshe (P.E.T.A., 1981), esp. pp. 10, 19-23, 37-44, 56-58, 100-103; see also p. 123 of the present book for its place within the 'conference approach'; and also p. 195.

'By the third day of school,' says the teacher, 'all twenty-two children had their own journals and were all writing . . . I wondered why I had waited so long to let my children write in other years.' A little later she made a startling discovery. Chiefly because of the writing, the children were learning to read — faster than any class of hers ever had before! After three months their confident writing was shaping stories: 'Forty-seven books have been typed and sewn into hard covers which have become their reading. Because my children write, they now say, "Yes, we can read!"'[3]

What is the 'process of writing' at this beginning stage? Graves declares that to begin creating written sentences a child needs only half a dozen letters, usually consonants; no matter which half dozen. Here are two examples with dates, of how children refine their invented spelling:

Toni's Pattern

11/10	LC	— like
	LAT	— liked
12/8	LOCT	— liked
12/19	L	— like
4/10	LICT	— liked
	KLIC	— like
5/14	LIKE	
5/21	LIKE	

Sarah's Pattern

11/20	FLLAOWZ	— flowers
	FLLAWRZ	
	FLAWR	— flower
1/11	FLAWRS	
6/1	FLOWERS	

Toni's early writing might have been a caption to a picture:

I LC TH GM (I like this game.)

The process of moving ahead is usually accompanied by a good deal of drawing and speaking. The drawing seems to crystallise thought in preparation for writing; the speaking that is most important is the audible or sub-audible sounding of words while selecting the best letters to represent the sounds, though there is usually also some talking with friends or the teacher. Graves observes that the writing of this stage is in fact more speech than writing.

'Invented spelling' means spelling a word the way it sounds. Only rudimentary phonics are needed for this; indeed, rigorous phonics drills would be counter-productive. The spellings seem to pass through observable 'sequences of development'. The earliest effort is usually to get the beginning and end sounds right; later, by degrees, the middles are filled in. Pressures for refinement towards standard correctness are many: the child's own strong inner developmental drive, all the parallel reading that is going on, the comments of the teacher, parents and classmates, and, in the New Hampshire experiment, the practice of 'publishing' some of the children's finished work as a book which, in the manner of adult published writing, is edited to standard correctness by the teacher after the child has revised as much as possible.

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[3] *Donald Graves in Australia*, ed. R. D. Walshe (P.E.T.A., 1981), pp. 100-103.

After perhaps a year, the children's growing control of handwriting and relating of letters to sounds is accompanied by other signs of change: they draw less, they talk less, and their vocalising while they spell diminishes (or is 'internalised'). But they then show increasing interest in what Graves calls 'prosodics' — attempts to *invent* written devices for achieving speech effects. Thus they might capitalise the first letter of any word considered important, or capitalise whole words, or blacken a capital or word, or underline words or phrases, or use multiple exclamation marks, and so on.

Clearly there is more to 'invented spelling' than just spelling. With only a little direction from the teacher, but with generous support, time and opportunity, the children are able to invent their way into spelling, punctuation, handwriting, written composing and reading. It is very significant. LET THEM WRITE! By this path they control their own writing from the first day of school. The control is not taken away by too much teaching, or by copying of adult models, or by treating writing as a poor cousin of reading.

Setting up the beginning writing class. What conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing review of some of the 'many paths to beginning writing'?

1. *Traditional Teaching Was Marred by Three Great Misconceptions. First,* writing was regarded as subordinate to reading: children were restrained from writing until they achieved some progress in reading. *Second,* writing was then initially equated with handwriting: children were restrained from composing until they achieved some competence in the copying of handwriting. *Third,* writing was thereafter identified with mechanical correctness: children were restrained from writing genuinely, about their real concerns, and instead wrote in exercise conditions and were assessed almost exclusively for formal correctness. Clearly it is necessary to put an end to all these restraints.

2. *We Must Emphasise the Type of Learning That Produces Willing Writers.* Underlying the many approaches to the teaching of beginning writing are two main types of learning process, namely *imitation* and *discovery.* Traditional approaches greatly overemphasised imitation, for learning to write meant mainly copying adult models. Later 'language-experience' approaches, with their stress on the teacher's scribing of pupil-originated messages, effected a compromise between imitation and discovery insofar as the message was the pupil's discovery while the scribed writing was for imitation by the pupil. More recently, 'invented-spelling' approaches emphasise powerfully the discovery of both message and medium by the child; they minimise imitation.

In all learning there is an interweaving of imitation and discovery. The most rigorous copy-and-drill regime cannot prevent some discovery from taking place, while the most permissive write-as-you-please conditions always include elements of imitation. There is no question here of absolute 'right' and 'wrong'. Rather we must ask which *emphasis* will bring the best result in the long run — will produce children who not only spell and punctuate correctly but above all write willingly and confidently.

The research of Marie Clay, Glenda Bissex, Donald Graves and many others leaves no room to doubt that the traditional emphasis on imitation needs to give way to emphasis on discovery. We need to LET THEM WRITE, let them engage in a great deal of 'self-directed activity' which includes invented spelling and writing on self-chosen topics.

More programmatically the teacher should check out the following four basic elements of the beginning 'writing situation'.[4]

3. We Must Foster a Positive 'Writing Situation'.

(a) *The Young Writer.* Is each child's desire to write encouraged? Is writing continually treated as important? Is help swiftly given when frustrations arise and small fingers grow tired?

(b) *Ideas.* Is the child encouraged to write in the area of his or her expertise, that is, encouraged to select and write about personal interests and experiences?

(c) *Craft.* Is plenty of time allowed for experiment with writing? And tolerance of talk during the writing process? And discussion of the *how* of writing?

(d) *Audience.* Is the teacher, like a good conversationalist, as ready to listen as to comment? To treat the message as even more important than its form? Can the audience be widened to parents, classmates and others? Can the writing be illustrated and 'published' as a book?

4. Fundamentals and Incidentals. If LET THEM WRITE is our fundamental approach, thereby sending these beginners exploring along the path of discovery learning, we should also fill the classroom with useful incidentals: books galore and other print materials, with pupil-made books very prominent; wall charts of the alphabet and fine script and handwritten poems and passages; reference words and phrases on objects around the room; wallboards displaying the children's current writing and illustrating; word games, including 'Breakthrough to Literacy'; and much else — not least a deeply involved teacher who adds example to advice by sometimes writing along with the class and passing this writing around with the pupils' writing.

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[4] On the 'writing situation', see p. 23.

STAGES IN WRITING DEVELOPMENT

Question 4

'What are the stages in the development of writing ability?'

'What are the stages in the development of children's writing ability?' 'At what stages should the conventions of writing be progressively introduced?' . . . These two questions[1], obviously related, are the only ones which some South Australian teachers considered had not been answered by the S.A. Education Department's 1979 text, *Writing: R-7 Language Arts*. Clearly, they felt that a neat set of stages would help them in planning lessons.

The tricky concept of 'stages'

But are there *stages* in writing development? The authors of the text might be forgiven for avoiding this issue since research into it is still in its early days and because there is as yet little agreement among the researchers.

Moreover, the term 'stages of development' deserves to be viewed sceptically. For teachers, it carries strong Piagetian overtones. Their first thought will be, 'Must the (hypothesised) writing stages necessarily parallel or indeed be sub-sections of Piaget's long-standing and famous four stages: sensory-motor (0-2 years), pre-operational (2-7), concrete operations (7-11), formal operations (12-15)?' The question is clouded nowadays, first, by critics like Noam Chomsky who oppose the very idea of stages (Who needs 'stages' if children have an inborn 'language acquisition device' which only needs 'experiences' to set it going?) and, second, by a growing band of critics who see Piaget's stages as too neat, too unqualified, too invariable (Margaret Donaldson, for instance, who, among other things, disagrees with Piaget's case for extreme egocentrism in early childhood: see her *Children's Minds*, Fontana, 1978).

The qualifications introduced by such critics testify to a growing appreciation of the complexity of their subject — the child. It is a complexity already clearly evident in the preschool child: '. . . in dozens of laboratories and hospitals, modern researchers are discovering that infants are enormously complex. "They are capable of doing much more than we think much earlier than we thought," says psychologist Michael Lewis, director of the Institute for the Study of Exceptional Children in Princeton, N.J.'[2] Such mounting evidence is a caution against any fixing of 'stages' which might generalise too much and so cause adults to underrate what individual children may do.

After all, children of 5 or 6 are already 'very sophisticated speaker-listeners'. This is the estimate of Dr Paula Menyuk, a leading authority on childhood language. As proof she points to some of a normal child's attainments.

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[1] *Newsletter*, Wattle Park Teachers Centre, S.A., April, 1981.

[2] *Newsweek*, 12/1/1981.

> By the time the child enters school he has a vocabulary of 2 to 3 thousand words. He uses the major syntactic categories of sentence, subject and predicate, verb, noun, pronoun, determiner, adjective, adverb and preposition. He can generate declarative, imperative, negative and question sentence types and he can generate them in the active and passive mood. He uses markers of number, place, time, manner and possession. He can conjoin and embed sentences, and, thus, theoretically has achieved the ability to create indefinitely long sentences. He can express the logical notions of actor-action-object, of negation, of conjunction of actor or action or object, of cause and effect and of equality.[3]

It is against this *general* picture of extraordinarily complex preschool language development that the *specific* problem of writing development and the attempts to reduce it to a small number of stages must be discussed. Of course, writing at once adds a new dimension of complexity. Teachers need to appreciate the extent of this complexity — indeed they need to do so from the moment the schoolchild first picks up a pencil, crayon or pen. As Marlene Scardamalia says:

> Even a casual analysis makes it clear that the number of things that must be dealt with simultaneously in writing is stupendous: handwriting, spelling, punctuation, word choice, syntax, textual connections, purpose, organization, clarity, rhythm, euphony, the possible reactions of various possible readers, and so on. To pay conscious attention to all of these would overload the information-processing capacity of the most towering intellects.[4]

Perhaps, though, an initial writing 'stage' would not be hard to delineate at the most elementary level, when children grapple with 'the code'? That is, when they grapple with handwriting, the alphabet, left-to-right direction, and early spelling and punctuation. But even here, nothing is straightforward. This early period could only be marked off as a 'code stage' if the children were confined to the copying and drilling of prescribed words, sentences and passages (as of course they often were in the past). There is, however, no excuse today for imposing such a deadening regimen. Evidence abounds that children can begin to express their own ideas as they make their earliest marks on paper — for example, using 'invented spelling' (see p. 123). So the term 'code stage' is misleading because it is far too limiting of what the children are capable of. Even from the beginning point in learning-to-write at school, the search for 'stages' becomes appallingly difficult: the code or writing system is thoroughly mixed with the ideas, attitudes, experiences, talents, etc., of the apprentice writers.

Before leaving this beginning level of learning to write, let us note an example of the perils that can attend nomination of a 'stage' which is held to be obligatory for a whole class. A teacher, believing in a 'code stage', imposed the copying of stock sentences on her class. This suited Helen who enjoyed writing neatly, but it was stifling for George who was eager to express his own ideas and felt impatient with the writing system. Individual difference *in development* were latent in this class and needed to be dealt with individually. A teaching strategy that derives from a simplistic 'stage of development' can impose sustained and damaging writing experiences on the Georges in any class.

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[3] Paula Menyuk, 'Aspects of Language Acquisitions and Implications for Later Language Development', *English in Australia* (A.A.T.E.), February, 1972, p. 10.

[4] Quoted by Carl Bereiter, 'Development in Writing', in *Cognitive Processes in Writing*, ed. L.W. Gregg and E.R. Steinberg (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1980), p. 80.

Two attempts to delineate 'stages'

In Australia, the best-known attempt to categorise writing in stages is that of the London Schools Council Project headed by James Britton. This project, unfortunately, did not begin by studying beginning writers like Helen and George, nor did it study the *processes* by which children produce writing; rather it looked at *products*, 2000 scripts written by 500 secondary school pupils. The Project's categories are commonly referred to as 'writing functions' but they are also, from another viewpoint, stages-of-development, as described by Britton:

> . . . In terms of linguistic competence, then, we see expressive discourse as an area of discourse where the rules of use are at their least demanding. As writers improve in their ability to meet the demands, on the one hand, of participant tasks and, on the other, of tasks in the spectator role, they will internalise two distinct sets of rules of use: from the matrix of expressive writing, they will acquire competence in both transactional and poetic modes of writing.[5]

In other words, unless children are pushed prematurely into stilted formal writing, they will naturally write from an *'expressive'* centre where language is relaxed and casual, close to conversational speech ('in developmental terms, the expressive is a kind of matrix from which the differentiated forms of mature writing are developed'[6]) then, by degrees, they will develop towards either *'transactional'* writing, seen as the kind that gets the work of the world done, or *'poetic'* writing, the kind that is valued for its own sake, its literary worth.

These categories, *expressive — transactional — poetic*, have the advantage of being few and apparently simple. As the first 'New English' classification of writing to appear on the scene in Australia (i.e. after the 1966 Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching of English, held at Dartmouth College, USA) they swiftly entered common currency. But subsequently they have been so widely criticised by other researchers as to call into question the worthwhileness of trying to reduce the immense complexity of writing — its 'functions' or its 'development' — to a few convenient categories.

For example, the prominent American researcher of the writing process, Janet Emig, challenges the central Britton category, the 'expressive'. She cannot see how it can be separated from 'transactional' and 'poetic' — and 'I have trouble with certain aspects of the transactional as well.'[7] Andrew Wilkinson et al.,[8] a British research team, are similarly critical of the view that the 'poetic' develops out of the 'expressive'; they find that narrative ('the major form which predominantly constitutes the poetic') is already highly developed in preschool children: 'Our work suggests a strong line of development of the narrative proceeding directly from spoken to written mode, which does not need to be explained by a concept such as the expressive. Indeed there are reasons for believing that narrative is a basic way of processing experience and thus a basic mode of language, precisely because man thinks and acts in time.' These researchers feel that the 'transactional' category has value, but they believe strongly that 'by failing to define expressive and poetic in developmental detail the model is unable to describe large areas of human experience as manifested in language'.

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[5] James Britton, 'The Composing Processes and the Functions of Writing', in *Research on Composing*, ed. R. Cooper and L. Odell (N.C.T.E., 1978), p. 27.

[6] James Britton et al., *The Development of Writing Abilities* (11-18) Macmillan, 1975, p. 83.

[7] *English Journal*, N.C.T.E., October, 1979, p. 14.

[8] 'The Development of Writing', *English in Education*, N.A.T.E., Autumn 1980, p. 11.

Another critic of the 'London model' is Carl Bereiter* who offers, as an alternative, five 'possible stages in writing development'. He is careful at the outset to limit the concept of a 'stage':

> The word 'stage' inevitably evokes the idea of Piagetian stages and all their associated conceptual baggage, but the word is used here with a more limited connotation. A stage is simply a form of organisation that is preceded or followed by other forms. To suggest that there may be distinct stages in the development of writing abilities is not to suggest that those stages are universal or that they have a necessary order, much less that they are yoked to the Piagetian stages of cognitive development. The stages to be described here have a seemingly natural order to them, but *it is quite conceivable that with a different sort of educational experience children might go through different stages with a different kind of order.* [My emphasis — R.D.W.]

He begins by identifying 'six different systems of knowledge or skill' in 'mature writing': fluency in producing written language, fluency in generating ideas, mastery of written conventions, social cognition (taking account of the reader), literary discrimination, and reflective thought. His five 'possible stages' are built from these 'skill systems' (the first stage combining the first two systems):

1. *Associative Writing.* This, the 'simplest system capable of producing intelligible writing', combines fluency in written language with fluency in generating ideas. It is the elementary ability to write whatever comes to mind in whatever order it comes.

2. *Performative Writing.* This is the 'integration of associative writing with knowledge of stylistic conventions'. It is not a stage in the sense of a 'massive reorganisation of behaviour' but rather a 'vast number of skill integrations' — spellings, punctuation of diverse constructions, use and avoidance of various expressions, etc.

3. *Communicative Writing.* Here performative writing is integrated with a feeling for the audience and the ability to adapt the message accordingly.

4. *Unified Writing.* The writer is now sufficiently in command of the craft to be able to manifest a self-critical personal viewpoint and style, writing 'not merely to entertain the reader but also to please oneself'.

5. *Epistemic Writing.* The 'culmination of writing development', this stage sees writing as making possible the deepest reflective thought, especially because this thought is objectified on paper where it can be reviewed and revised as often as desired.

How does Bereiter see children's *development* taking place through his 'stages'? In contrast to the assertive exponents of the 'London model', he is cautious, even hesitant. He rejects the idea that there is a 'natural order of writing development, in the sense of a fixed sequence that all writers must go through.'[10] He ventures to suggest that 'it is at least meaningful to think of writing development in terms of discrete stages, each characterised by conscious focus on a particular aspect of writing.' And he allows that his stages 'may be ordered differently by different educational approaches'. So, a possible order *might* indeed proceed as he has presented his stages: associative — performative — communicative — unified — epistemic.

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* 'Development in Writing' by Carl Bereiter, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-93.

But is it really useful to describe these as 'stages'? My belief is that certainly the first three are highly abstract generalisations for what is better regarded as innumerable interweaving strands of skills and understandings that make up the complex texture of nearly all writing. I cannot discuss here a number of other attempts to categorise writing as so many developmental stages. I have raised a few issues concerning Britton's well-known model (the only one known to a fair number of Australian teachers) and Bereiter's alternative model in order to give teachers a beginning insight into the problems involved—insight enough, I hope, to engender an open, interested, critical attitude appropriate to a time of renaissance in the teaching and researching of writing.

The best writing is a 'mix'

When I turn from the high abstraction of Britton's three categories and Bereiter's five to local classrooms of 5, 6 and 7 year olds influenced by the 'conference approach' (see p. 121), I feel I am on a different planet. These small children are busily writing in a variety of forms—lists, messages, letters, stories, poems, autobiographies, how-to articles, advertisements. They are generating original ideas, mastering conventions, communicating effectively, adopting self-critical attitudes to their work. I find myself floundering. Into which of Britton's or Bereiter's categories shall I thrust 6 year old Frank's battle story—expressive or poetic, associative or performative? Or 7 year old Marie's letter of complaint about the school tuckshop—expressive or transactional, performative or communicative? More important, is there any value in doing so? How can I help either Frank or Marie in that way to develop as writers?

My own view, after ten years association with infants, primary, secondary and adult writing classes is that, as yet, the categories we have are not of much help to the classroom teacher. Often, indeed, I feel moved to defend schoolchildren's writing against attempts at categorisation—by exclaiming as did a poet friend of Janet Emig on hearing the 'business of categories' applied to professional writing: 'What a silly thing to do. The best modern writing is a mix.'[11] So is most children's writing a mix. But, then, I am obliged to remember that research in this area is mainly recent and that more helpful classifications may yet be devised.

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[10] Marie Clay on beginning writers: 'Observation of children suggests that they do not learn about language on any one level of organisation before they manipulate units at higher levels . . . As the child learns to write there is a rich intermingling of language learning *across* levels which probably accounts in some way for the fast progress which the best children can make . . . The individual child's progress in mastering the complexity of the writing system seems to involve letters, words, and word groups all at the one time, at first in approximate, specific and what seem to be primitive ways and later with considerable skill. If there is an acquisition sequence which can be described for all children I have not been able to discover it . . .'—*What Did I Write?* (Heinemann, 1975, p. 19).

Modest 'markers of development'?

In 1979 Janet Emig expressed a belief that a number of researchers are 'beginning to' see signs of a development sequence in 'children from six to nine or ten', and she said that her own work in this area supported that of Donald Graves who 'thinks he can identify some markers of developing maturity'.

But even this gentle concept is hedged with difficulties, if only because, as another researcher observes, the goal of 'maturity' is vague: 'No one has satisfactorily defined what adult competence in writing consists of or what level of competence college students can reasonably be expected to achieve.'[12]

However, Graves' intention to identify 'markers' deserves to be watched. No one is more conscious than he of the dangers of categorising child behaviour. 'Down with nominalism!' he said on one occasion at the Third International English Teaching Conference. He not only regards 'stages' as suspect but says 'we must get rid of the grade-age syndrome that plagues education.' Yet he regards 'developmental information' as important: '. . . it provides a means to observe children and read out from what they do in order to help them with the next step, i.e. to ask the next, best question that will trigger a new growth step . . . the next step is always the issue for any learner.'

So, in the writing development debate, Graves says he wants to locate a 'middle ground' and he chooses to speak with restraint of 'sequences of growth—that is, if the child is doing this right now, the next thing I can look for is . . .'[13]

Anything more than such 'sequences of growth' can be dangerous. 'Categories' or 'stages' can all too easily become exercise hoops of rigidly graded difficulty through which children are made to jump regardless of their individual propensities. Graves' modest 'sequences', when they appear in a book promised for late 1982[14], are likely to be helpful at the classroom level, while highly abstract 'stages' are not.

ADDENDUM Graves will also discuss fluctuations *within* 'development'. Children's writing performance fluctuates from day to day. This reality is often neglected by researchers who are in pursuit of neatly unfolding 'stages' of the ever-onward-and-upward-with-no-going-back kind. Should a teacher demand that a child perform today at the same high level achieved yesterday—or last week or whenever? Or even demand better? Well, there's no harm in hoping or even in setting up some kindly positive expectation—but certainly not demand!

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[11] *English Journal*, N.C.T.E., October, 1979, p. 14.

[12] Lester Faigley, 'Names in Search of a Concept: Maturity, Fluency, Complexity, and Growth in Written Syntax', *College Composition and Communication*, N.C.T.E., October, 1980.

[13] Donald Graves, in a letter to the writer, answering a question, 31/1/1981.

[14] To be published by Heinemann Educational; provisionally titled, *Two Crafts: Teaching and Writing*.

No such demand would be made of an adult. We accept, for instance, that 'The life of an artist is like a yo-yo . . . elation—depression, excitement—bewilderment. We forget that writing is writing, whether for child or professional . . . In a class of 25 children only five will be on "big topics" on any single day. The fallacy has been that *every child* is working on a great topic every day.'

The 'big topic' is when writing hits a rich vein of personal experience: '. . . the child's voice is strong, the intentions high, with possibly a heightened sense of audience (though the audience of self is to be included here as well) . . . the child is surprised that he/she knew so much, surprised to find that the writing went so well. Under these conditions, children explode some of our notions about what they can or can't do.'[15]

We mustn't demand that all of a child's writing shall be of equal worth; indeed, we must help the child to *not* feel discouraged when a piece, despite effort, turns out to be disappointing. In a classroom where the writing process is continually under observation and discussion, the phenomenon of fluctuation will be an important area of concern.

ORACY AND WRITING

Question 5

'Isn't teaching oracy more important than teaching writing?'

No! Emphatically no! This question was surely spawned when a careless linguist said, 'Speech is primary, writing is secondary.' He only meant (and should have made clear) that in the development of our species and in each person's life, speech came first and writing later. A rather obvious point about historical order. That's all.

In a similar way, agriculture is 'primary' and manufacturing 'secondary'. But is agriculture *more important?* Of course not. Nor is it less important. Each has its place; each complements the other.

And so it is with speech and writing.

But the question contains another and subtler confusion. *Teaching* oracy, *teaching* writing? The schools certainly have to *teach* writing (and reading), but it is absurd to think they have the same (or a greater!) responsibility for oracy.

Our pupils have learnt to talk and listen long before they get to school. There is no question of teaching them 'basic skills of oracy', for they have learnt these in the home. *The responsibility of the school is to give the children opportunities to* use — *and so* develop — *the oral abilities they already possess.* This can mostly be done by simply allowing them to discuss the problems that arise in the ongoing work of the classroom, though some special speech situations may occasionally need to be set up and some special skill may need to be demonstrated.

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[15] Donald Graves, in a letter to the writer, answering a question, 1/9/1981.

On the other hand, the school has to teach literacy from the start, for only a minority of children begin school with even a small understanding of reading and writing. In particular, the only writing done by most of them during their primary years will be done in class or as homework. Writing is thus at a huge disadvantage! Compare the small amount of school-induced writing with all the talking the children do, not only in school, but much more abundantly in playground, street and home.

No wonder children find writing relatively difficult! First of all, they don't do nearly enough of it. (Any aspect of language fluency depends on use-in-quantity.) Second, writing is different from speech; it is *not* simply speech written down. It has to express each time an explicit context, whereas person-to-person speech takes the context for granted and so can leave many things unsaid; moreover, writing has to be more concise, connected and convention-observing than nearly all speech. So young writers will only attain skill and fluency if the school provides plently of writing, informal and formal, day by day.

In short, my argument disposes me to answer the question by asserting the opposite: 'The responsibility of the primary school is much heavier for writing than for speech'. But I am immediately aware that there is no need to play one off against the other. There is plenty of room for both, provided they are not taught separately, but proceed interwoven most of the time. Since the question concentrates on 'oracy' let me present a picture from that angle . . .

1. *Allow a natural flow of work-oriented talk.* Create classroom conditions (e.g. a 'workshop', learning areas, group projects, etc.) in which children are able naturally to discuss their ongoing work.

2. *Make sure the problems are real.* Only when children feel that the work is answering real needs will they use talk creatively as an integral part of the problem-solving *process*, which may include asking, researching, reading, reflecting, note-making, writing.

3. *See the child as a learner, not an empty vessel.* Each child *learned* to talk by chattering on about real concerns, at best with a loving adult occasionally responding to, and elaborating on, what the child was originating. This 'home learning' model can guide the school learning (i.e. further development) of oracy: the teacher lets the children talk among themselves about their work, appreciates individuality of style, draws attention to the range from colloquial to formal, enjoys play with language, may help to complete some of the children's partial utterances and to elaborate on some of their statements.

4. *Prize one-to-one teacher and child communication.* The teacher who leaves the 'up-front' position to mingle with children who are going about their work in 'learning areas' or 'workshop' conditions will contribute best to oral development through *individual conferences* — that is, a minute or two of conversation about a child's work, whether at the problem stage, or in process of accomplishing, or at the end by a positive response to the product. Such conferences, when they are about writing, are an ideal way to blend talking and writing.

5. *Question the value of 'oral situations' exercises.* Day by day classroom work-talk, with its many genuine interactions including

teacher-pupil conferences, will produce better oral development than the oral exercise 'situations' that are set up sporadically in classrooms. There is of course a place for 'situations' (as within a drama program) but they should never be seen as the whole 'teaching of oracy', as often happened in the past.

In brief, the good news about 'teaching oracy' is — don't *teach* it, but do encourage talking and listening as real, natural learning activities woven into the whole texture of your purposeful classroom . . . It is the difference between the old *teaching* what-to-think and the new *learning* how-to-think.

SPEECH AND WRITING DIFFERENCES

Question 6

'Most people believe writing is little more than speech-written-down. Just how different is writing from speech?'

Writing and speech serve different purposes and they differ in many ways, yet we shouldn't overemphasise the differences. After all, they share a common base and most writers agree that good writing when read aloud should 'sound like speech' — though they would quickly add that considerable skill goes into producing a 'speech-based prose' effect. In fact many writers test their prose by *speaking* it, and all good writers develop an 'inner ear' for 'listening to the sound of words on paper'. These are signs that writing mustn't distance itself too far from the spoken language, for to do so would be to court an artificial-sounding prose, perhaps heavy or stilted or forbiddingly formal.

Yet the differences are important. If you ask your students to record some talk and then transcribe it literally, they will soon begin to notice some differences. They will see that writing can't be an exact transcription of speech. You might then go on to discuss differences like these . . .[1]

1. Most obviously, speech and writing differ as sign systems (or 'symbol' or 'signalling' systems). Speech is a system of word-sound signs which are normally supported by a wealth of subsidiary signs including intonation, rhythm, emphasis, pause, pace, physical gesture and facial expression. In sharp distinction, writing is a silent language, a system of signs on paper which try to represent the spoken language. This

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[1] This answer and what follows is unavoidably general. Reading it, please remember the great range of both talking and writing, from extremely informal to highly formal. As talk becomes more premeditated it usually draws closer to the structures and vocabulary of writing; and writing, as it becomes more intimate, tends to 'sound more like talk'.

representation is phonetic (or 'phonic'), an attempt to match *letters* to the *sounds* of speech, but the attempt is only partly successful. At several points writing departs from speech and goes its own visual way. For instance, it breaks up the relatively continuous speech-flow by inserting equal space between words; it employs many spellings that are only partially phonetic; and, in an effort to compensate for the wealth of subsidiary speech signs, it uses a relatively meagre system of marks (punctuation, paragraph indent, italics) to group words and suggest emphasis.

2. Talk has existed for countless thousands of years; it is said to be natural and its origins can only be guessed at. In contrast, writing is an invention barely 5000 years old.[2] Its early scripts (e.g. hieroglyphic, cuneiform) were so difficult that temple elites could monopolise them; only since about 900-700 B.C. has there been an alphabet — developed by the Greeks from the Phoenicians — manageable by anyone with an elementary education.

3. Speech deserves to be called natural because it needs no technology and can flow at any time. But writing is much less readily available. It needs the technology of pen, paper and eraser; it needs a place where these artefacts can be kept and used; and it needs a place where the written products can be stored.

4. Speech is also natural in that it is very much more 'caught' than 'taught', an acquirement that precedes schooling. The schools take speech for granted and never refer to it as a 'basic skill', whereas writing is seen in all countries as a 'basic skill' that primary schools are responsible for teaching to the whole younger generation.

5. Nearly everyone finds talk spontaneous and easy, a social act stimulated initially by another's presence and sustained by the to-and-fro of conversation. Writing is usually more demanding. A private if not lonely act, it requires strong intention and sustaining self-discipline. Patience too is needed in waiting for a response, if any, from the absent audience.

6. Talk is abundant; we say 'talk is cheap' but it doesn't even cost a cent, and so we use it generously, or carelessly. Perhaps that is why it is taken for granted and seldom valued. But writing, being relatively laborious and obliged to compete for the readers' limited attention, tends to use as few words as possible. It is never taken for granted by the writers themselves: they love it or hate it or have a love-hate relationship with it.

7. Speech is ephemeral (unless trapped on tape) while writing is permanent. Writing can be looked at again and again, critically, by both writer and readers. It can be preserved for future reference. This permanence tends to make the writer more committed in its production, more careful and responsible. Not surprisingly, written language is on the whole more conservative than spoken language, more convention-bound and more resistant to change. Innovation is common in spoken language but extremely rare in written language.

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[2] 'True writing begins when pictures, by their nature and by the sequence in which they are placed, are able to substitute for the spoken words of a given language.' — Robert Claiborne, *The Birth of Writing* (Time-Life, 1974).

8. Speech is quick, writing is slow. The talker easily accommodates a swift rush of thought but the writer must learn to hold thoughts in check while the hand catches up. For this reason, among others, the two acts of composing are very different.

9. Slips and even slipshodness are often tolerated in talking but not in writing. Talkers can occasionally flub pronunciations, repeat themselves, get tangled and backtrack, make grammatical clangers, use expletive *ers* and *ums* and *you knows* and *sort ofs* — all without giving serious offence. But writers are typically expected to compose more correctly and concisely.

10. Persons talking can take 'context' for granted; they know where they are and why. But writing is composed in one place and read in another, so the writer must provide the context, that is, must indicate explicitly the context of *who, what, where, when* and *why.*

11. The slowness of written composing has its advantages. Writing can be a more careful kind of thinking, more concentrated, connected and correct. It allows time for thoughtful reflection — time to 'think twice' before uttering, time to 'choose my words carefully'. Once a thought is scribbled on the page it can be subjected to a process of pondering, revising, extending, putting aside, taking up again, revising further, and so on till it is considered right. So it can be a deeper kind of thinking than we can achieve while speaking. This, surely, is the most profound difference between speech and writing.

12. Both speech and writing obviously have important roles in school learning. We can approach an understanding of their different contributions by an historical analogy: speech brought mankind to the eve of civilisation but then writing was invented to cope with the complexity of civilised society. Speech is useful up to a point and then we turn to writing, especially in two of its roles: as a deeper kind of thinking and as a permanent record. These make writing an ideal — not to mention ideally cheap — medium for passing complex and extensive knowledge from one generation to the next. From the individual student's viewpoint, discussion can carry understanding of a topic a certain way and then reading of books, jotting of notes, writing of essays, etc. become necessary.

13. Finally, while speech and writing have much in common in their choice of words and choice of sentence structures, they also typically reveal differences. We use a more *varied* vocabulary in writing than in speech and at the same time scrupulously avoid wordiness. In speech, so the linguists assure us, we tend to effortlessly produce sentences of somewhat higher grammatical complexity than those we use in writing. Yet the construction of our written sentences with their lower clause complexity causes us painstaking effort. Partly this is due to the packing into these sentences of a larger number of 'high content' words, but more importantly it is due to the need to achieve the smooth 'connectedness' which alone will satisfy the 'speeding eye of the reader': '. . . connectedness is the essence of writing,' says G. W. Turner, 'as interchange is the essence of speech.' Spoken sentences tend to be more loosely strung together with a narrow range of connectives (perhaps chiefly *and, but, that, which, though, because, so, or, nor*); they tend to be short and sometimes even

interrupted, unfinished, repetitious or verbless. But writing must always be consciously and carefully structured. Concerned as it is with overall conciseness and unity, it uses complete, content-packed sentences linked by a wide range of connective devices (see list, p. 229) which sustain its smooth flow as linear monologue.

WRITING AND GRAMMAR

Question 7

'How much grammar should be taught in the primary school? And, if any, how should it be taught?'

This is a straightforward question. It comes from every primary teacher who is under pressure from 'back to basics' ideology.

A decade ago, as you know, a revolution toppled grammar teaching from the eminence it had enjoyed in education for two hundred years. There was blood on the floor, as in every revolution, and the marks of it can still be found around the classrooms.

But revolutions never produce a completely new New Order. Some of the old is found to be indispensable. It is usually admitted, disapprovingly, by the back door . . . And so, I believe, with grammar.

The revolution properly put an end to the suffering of the oppressed (junior) citizenry by banishing the systematic, detailed teaching of what the historical record will term 'school traditional grammar', with its pedantic parsing, its eleven kinds of adverbial clause, and the rest. Long live the revolution!

The more extreme revolutionaries announced their faith that not a scrap of value came from learning grammar. Quite categorically they asserted that grammar does not help in any way to improve one's writing (and several long-neglected research findings, from as early as 1906, were brought out to back the contention).

Now, that's the point at which the revolution went too far. The research could never be as conclusive as that. No one could be sure, for instance, that *some* points of grammar did not give children more confidence in writing sentences, say, for 'formal' audiences.

Anyway, a decade later the voices of 100% revolutionism are less strident. Soon we will be able to have one of those 'agonising reappraisals' which bring balance back into human judgment — in this case a balance between the extremes of revolution (no grammar whatsoever) and the extremes of reaction (daily grammar drills, the more the better). It does not mean that a return to the awful Old Order is at hand. Rather, we can now ask the artless question, 'How much grammar?' Or, better still, 'Are there points of grammar that *can* help a child's written composing?'

Having asked such questions of linguists and received only vague or general I-won't-desert-the-revolution type answers (and having insisted to no avail that such answers aren't of any help to classroom teachers handling children's writing today), I begin to perceive that this is not specially the province of linguists. Any experienced writer should be able to work out the points of grammar that he or she has found helpful. In my own case, fifteen years of editing have given me an insight into the points at which many writers would have benefited from a *conscious understanding of certain points of grammar.* So, on the authority of my own observations, I offer this view . . .

A study of the general system of English grammar is a major undertaking which contributes little to the solving of a writer's many practical problems. However there are five small areas of grammar teaching/learning that can help writers to be conscious avoiders of error. The best time to be thus conscious is at the revision stage in the writing process.

1. *A sentence needs a verb.* (This area requires attention to 'What is a verb?', 'What is a sentence?', and 'How is it possible in special conditions to write a verbless sentence?')

2. *It is sometimes useful to distinguish between 'sentence', 'clause', 'phrase'.* (In the intermittent classroom discussion of the structuring of sentences, these terms are indispensable.)

3. *Verbs need to agree in number with their subjects.* (This area includes the important activity of distinguishing subjects; but it emphatically need not include lessons on the 'predicate' — knowing what a 'predicate' is does not help a writer to write.)

4. *Simple present and past tense differences need to be identified.* (This is necessary for securing tense consistency in a composition.)

5. *Subject and object forms of personal pronouns need to be distinguished.* (Here, especially, written 'correctness' may clash with spoken 'deviation from standard'; but the standard form can be taught without invalidating a child's 'home language'.)

Can you think of any other point that can help children to write correctly — any that *is* a point of grammar and not 'mechanics' (punctuation, spelling) or 'usage' or 'style'? Paragraphing had better be left in a special pigeonhole, since linguists can't agree on 'the grammar of the paragraph', and in practice a wide margin of personal arbitrariness (style) prevails.

As to a grammatical terminology, it can be treated as part of the general 'vocabulary building' problem. That is, there is no question of teaching a terminology systematically or in a prescribed Year. It can grow on children as specific terms need to be used in the classroom. Which terms? Still those of traditional grammar, the ones in common use in dictionaries and usage guides: noun, pronoun, adjective, verb, adverb, article, preposition, conjunction, exclamation. These are quite enough for the primary school, though some few others may crop up (e.g. participle, infinitive, auxiliary, gender, case, passive/active).

When to teach/learn those five points of helpful grammar? and how? I do not envisage *any* systematic instruction nor can any 'right time' be prescribed for every class. I think the teacher involves the children in an abundance of interesting writing — and watches what happens. Only when weaknesses regularly show in the children's work between Years 4-6 need their attention be drawn to these few grammatical points that can help them. So the only grammar teaching takes place at the point of need. It is then provided individually, or for a group, but seldom in a demonstration or exercise for the whole class. There is no question of grade-by-grade whole-class progression in grammar instruction. In short, I see this minimal grammar teaching taking place only when the need for it is clearly signalled by a child's recurring weaknesses.

Very little more would be needed in the secondary school. (There I would add a sixth point: the active/passive difference.) The points would simply become much more consciously known; indeed, would become commonplaces. But I believe the secondary schools, in their own defence against the generalised and unreasoning pack cry for 'back to basics', should appoint a term in Year 9 or Year 10 when there is a *systematic revision* of these half dozen points of grammar and also of 'mechanics', so that the schools can say to the assembled employers-media-politicos, 'But all children in the state have been through a course in the very things you are talking about — and we have helped them to do a great deal more beside. They have done an abundance of writing in their primary and secondary years, writing which has had for its purpose not only the correct use of conventions but what matters even more — thinking clearly, getting meaning straight, communicating effectively.'

And in the whole of the K-6 period, the primary teacher's guiding thought will be: 'My purpose in teaching writing is to produce fluent, confident, willing writers. That is what the secondary school can justifiably expect of me. I will do nothing that inhibits or turns off the flow of the children's writing — certainly I'll impose no excess of grammar instruction. But as occasion calls for it, I will tell my pupils about these five points of grammar, and I am confident they will accept this as helpful advice needed in mastering the writer's craft.'

WRITING IN JOURNALS

Question 8

How valuable is a Journal? What uses are teachers making of Journals?

Extremely valuable. The Journal began to be taken up on a mass scale in Australia only in the late 1970s; since then its spread has been rapid. It is undoubtedly the most significant single development in the modern trend towards greater flexibility in the forms of school writing. But there is more to it than form.

A New Medium of Writing and Learning

In many ways the Journal is a banner-bearer of new, enlightened ideas that are putting an end to the era of artificial 'composition writing', an era characterised by enforced unpopular writing — 'one shot drafting', which had to be carried out in a set time, on a set topic, to a set form, with the teacher as marker of surface 'correctness', and no real readers.

Now the Journal offers children an everyday opportunity to carry out real writing. It is ideal for expressing their lives and interests, an endlessly flexible medium not hedged by restraints of time or format, one that calls for personal choice of topics and leaves to the writer the decision whether to show the writing to readers.

The Journal, then, is valuable for learning to write: it arouses interest and secures quantity of output and so it helps fluency. This is enough to justify its place in every classroom. But a further great advantage has emerged almost by accident: *the Journal is proving to be a powerful medium of learning,* not only of learning to write but of learning in every subject area. Teachers can therefore adopt a new teaching strategy, suggested by the slogan, 'Journals across the curriculum!'

What Is a Journal?

Only a wide definition will do. A Journal is any kind of notebook for one's freely chosen writing, even a looseleaf book, even loose sheets in a folder. It records any part of the writer's experience, of school or home or the wider world. Even a name for it is optional: journal, diary, logbook, daybook, personal book, writer's notebook.

Tristine Rainer begins the most important book so far produced on journal/diary writing with these words:

> The diary is the only form of writing that encourages total freedom of expression. Because of its very private nature, it has remained immune to any formal rules of content, structure, or style. As a result the diary can come closest to reproducing how people really think and how consciousness evolves. (*The New Diary: How to use a journal for self guidance and expanded creativity:* Angus & Robertson, 1980)

Using the terms *diary* and *journal* interchangeably she shows that the 'New Diary' or modern 'Journal' is more than the traditional 'rigid, daily calendar diary you may have kept as a child' (p.17); it is, rather, 'a phenomenon of the twentieth century', owing something to modern psychology and experimentation in writing and the arts.

> . . . It can help you understand your past, discover joy in the present, and create your own future . . . It allows you to develop an ease with writing and the habit of writing simply from using what you already have — your own experience. As you discover your natural voice in the diary, you can also begin to focus on your genuine interests and to collect material for many creative uses. (p.18)

She is addressing adult Journal writers, but the comments are easily adapted to pupil writers. Of course the complete freedom of the adult is not equalled by that of schoolchildren; they must keep a Journal if the teacher so decides; but *within* that constraint their freedom is great.

What Goes into the Journal?

Anything. Variety is the spice of Journal-keeping: a comment on an experience, an anecdote, a recollection of early childhood, the writing through of problems, how-I-feel-right-now, wishful thinking, dreams, stream-of-consciousness, diary of events, current affairs, sports notes, jokes, poems, dialogue (including conversation between friends). And there are possibilities that go beyond writing: cuttings, photos, cartoons, postcards, drawings (all with personally written captions or comments). Also copied material such as an admired passage from reading, a piece written by another student, the words of a favourite poem or song or prayer . . .

All this variety makes the Journal seem confusingly miscellaneous. On the other hand, the Journal may truthfully be revealing the confused normal state of the human mind, and out of such ragbag variety the writer may, by writing, *begin* to extract some order.

Tristine Rainer, without suggesting that any particular writing is proper or even preferable in a Journal, draws attention to 'four natural modes of expression' that are 'basic to all writing' and therefore likely to appear in anyone's free Journal writing. These, corresponding with the 'four basic modes of human perception' (emotion, sensation, intuition, intellect), deserve to be understood by any teacher who wishes to gain insight into the 'balance' of children's expressive behaviours. Following is a summary-paraphrase of her account, adapted to school Journal purposes:

1. *Express your feelings.* Express your pleasure, anticipation, depression, anger, etc. Feelings can make words flow. Incidentally, notice how strength of emotion can affect handwriting. (Cf. 'catharsis', the release and expression of emotions.)

2. *Describe your world.* Recreate on paper the world you experience, the world brought to you by your senses, imagination and dreams. Tell it in its details, but select those that are vivid and leave out the dull.

3. *Free-write to discover.* Relax and just write. Don't read back as you write, but wait till the end and then see what has surfaced in your

thinking. This flowing, releasing, intuition-sparking writing is generically termed 'free-writing' but has also been called 'spontaneous' or 'automatic' or 'stream of consciousness' writing.

4. *Reflect, question, suggest.* Asking why and attempting answers, you start to work out a philosophy of life. And when you pick up good ideas from others or from reading, you record them.

The first and third give voice to the more subjective, emotional, intuitive side of the self, the second and fourth to the more objective, questioning, rational side:

> The interrelationships in the diary among the various faculties of perception lead to self-knowledge and underlie all creativity. Together the four natural modes of expression can convey the full range of human experience. They permit release of emotion, confirmation of your relationship with the physical world, access to your inner consciousness, and contemplation of experience from a detached perspective. (p. 71)

Common Rules for Journal Writing

Journals evince individuality. Every child's Journal is a highly individual production. And every teacher seems to handle the Journal in an individual style in his or her classroom. The teacher who is new to Journals need not attempt too much all at once, but install just as much freedom for the writing as suits the situation in a class that has so far been formal in its approach. Here are some rules commonly found in Journal-writing classrooms. Every conceivable variation on them will also be found.

1. The Journal is a book for your own writing. You have great freedom to choose your own topics.
2. You are asked to do some writing in your Journal every day. Only [say] 10 minutes [depending on year level] is timetabled for this writing, but you will usually be able to find other time to make further entries.
3. Journals are never marked in detail. You are given credit [or full marks] for having done the required quantity of writing.
4. The privacy of your Journal will be respected. I will not read it unless you wish, but will 'sight' it each week to record that you have done the necessary minimum of writing. [Or say, 'Every fourth week, I will read your writing for that week only.']
5. If you forget to bring your Journal, you will do your writing that day on paper and copy it later into your Journal.
6. You are asked to show your Journal to other pupils, but this is not compulsory. Similarly you are asked to read and comment when others show you their Journals.
7. You may choose to have not one but two Journals: one for quick and quantity writing, the other for occasional, more careful, revised or complete pieces which you want to preserve.

Journals across the Curriculum

There are uses for the Journal in every subject area of the curriculum. (This may require a second notebook or looseleaf folder apart from the more personal Journal discussed so far.) Here the Journal is treated mainly as a learning medium. Previously, school writing, apart from the occasional 'composition' in English, tended to be either *notes*, dictated by the teacher or taken from books, or a rather formal *essay* on a set topic. Now the Journal functions helpfully between these extremes: it is especially a way of thinking out an attitude or answer to a problem.

Here are a few possible uses of the Journal in subject areas:

- to express an opinion about a social studies problem;
- to record observations of an experiment or field trip;
- to clarify impressions of a character in a drama;
- to sum up an insight gained from a talk on health;
- to play a mathematical game;
- to copy a poem or passage from reading;
- to articulate feelings while listening to music;
- to draw maps, models, sketches, diagrams;
- to capture an insight ('aha-a-a experience') in any subject.

Extremely valuable *for thinking* is subject-oriented writing on matters such as these:

- 'Write your first thoughts about . . .'
- 'What would you feel and do if . . .?'
- 'Imagine this situation: . . . Now, what . . .?'
- 'How do you propose to go about solving . . .?'

The Journal has uses as a learning resource every day and also many times a day — for writing in, reading from, talking about. For example, just five minutes writing on a problem, with every child obliged by the act of writing to really participate, will generate ideas and guarantee an animated discussion, interspersed with readings of entries. Or the teacher can pause at any point of interest in a lesson to ask everyone to write their thoughts for a few minutes . . . Such forms of 'thinking writing' usually work well because each child is gently pressured by the writing while performing at an individualised learning task.

Arousing and Sustaining Interest in Journals

- *Launching the Journal.* Never do this routinely. It is a great occasion, an adventure of ideas and self-exploration. If the class has had a previous Journal experience, build on it if it was positive; if not, set up new Journal goals and perhaps a changed format for the Journal itself. Thoroughly promote the importance of the Journal in both life and learning. Perhaps invite the Principal to give a launching talk which winds up with: 'I'll be keenly watching for developments in your writing, your ideas, your insights.'
- *Explaining to Parents.* As part of the launching, send an enthusiastic letter to parents explaining that the Journal is for learning to write and learning to think; that it is an additional form, not a substitute for other writing; that it is a personal kind of writing and its privacy must be as much respected at home as at school; that its private nature precludes it from being marked like other writing; that the teacher's supervision is directed towards ensuring that the writing is done; and that encouragement of writing at home as well as at school will be welcome, though it should not be enforced.

- *Setting an Example.* Announce that you too keep (or will keep) a Journal. Let them see you write in it. Occasionally read out one of your entries.
- *Being Ready [illegible] Help.* Especially at first, some children will need help in finding topics. Most will soon learn to devise their own; even so, every writer occasionally suffers from a 'block' and profits from a brief talk.
- *Showing Keen Interest.* Continually refer to the Journal. Suggest ideas for writing and invite the children to do likewise. Stop at key points in lessons and say, 'Let's catch this on the wing, with five minutes of writing!'
- *Saying 'It Helps Me'.* 'I'm happy to read your Journal — provided you ask me. I find it a marvellous way to learn what you think. I'm often amazed to find you have interests I never dreamed of.'
- *Using 'Emulation'.* Praise good things in individual Journals. Hold up examples. Encourage the voluntary swapping of Journals for reading. In such ways, awaken children to new possibilities for writing in their Journals.
- *Encouraging Reading Back.* Occasionally say, 'Let's spend some time reading back over the earlier parts of our Journals. Not only is this interesting but it usually sparks new ideas. At the end of our reading you can write a new comment.'
- *Appealing to Future Interest.* The idea always appeals to children that in years to come they will be fascinated to read, 'what I wrote about my life and thoughts when I was a 10 year old' (or whatever).
- *Marking to Build Confidence.* Depending on the teacher's policy, Journals may be unmarked or marked, spot-checked or collected, skimmed or read thoroughly. Their essential function is to allow every child to write at his or her individual level. This should not be invalidated by whatever marking/assessing/evaluating scheme is used. The aim should be to build the confidence of the writer. No heavier demand need be made than that *a quantity of writing has been maintained.* To have done that is to merit 'full marks'.

TEACHING POETRY WRITING

Question 9

'How can I go about teaching my class to write poetry?'

This question arose at an in-service course for K-12 teachers. The answer is therefore unavoidably general and needs to be adapted to the level of particular classes and children.

Well, poetry is writing too.

'That's obvious. Everyone knows that.'

Yes, it is obvious. But anyone who is exploring writing *as process* needs to see that poetry, like all the other kinds of writing, must pass through a process of pre-writing, drafting, revising.

'But isn't poetry written from white-hot inspiration?'

There, that's why we must start by saying, *Poetry is writing too.* If you think it is all inspiration, then you're saying it is entirely different from other writing—that there is no 'process' as in other writing. But there is. I like the way a modern writer, Marty Feldman, speaks of his poetry writing process:

> I write a poem in about an hour, but it takes me about six weeks to edit it down to what is virtually a telegram from me to myself. (*S.M.H.*, 19/8/1978).

There's sure to be a lot of inspiration in that first hour, but Feldman knows he hasn't got a 'poem' till six weeks later — after a great deal of disciplined crafting, that is, revising and polishing.

Of course other writers may work somewhat differently. The surviving manuscripts of the great poets show considerable variety in composing methods, but there is a strong common element of revision, often extensive and painstaking. Plenty of inspiration too, but hardly ever perfection at the first writing, except in very short pieces.

So let's start simply, by seeing poetry as writing. The class is going to do some poetry writing. This is a 'writing situation' with the same four basic elements we have defined on page 23 for writing in general: there is this intending pupil poet, the *writer,* his or her intended *readers,* a subject or *ideas* out of which a poem will be forged, and the techniques or *craft* that will do that forging. The teacher must have a program that applies each of those elements to the specific classroom situation:

1. WRITER: Win the class to a willingness to try poetry writing.
2. READERS: Help each child to find responsive readers.
3. IDEAS: Help each child to find subjects for poems.
4. CRAFT: Show the children the broad 'process' of poetry writing.

Clearly the teacher has a significant helping role. It does not mean that one can 'teach the child to write poetry' in the way that mechanical skills like addition or subtraction can be taught by drilling. Only the child can finally inject the creative element that brings a poem to life. But short of that, the teacher can help enormously — and teachers who know how to do so have often been heard to assert, in keeping with the title theme of this book, *'Every child can write poetry!'*[1]

1. Win the class to a willingness to try poetry writing.
This is by far the most important single contribution the teacher can make. It means a period of preparation before launching poetry writing. It also means a string of rather obvious DON'Ts: *don't* talk poetry to death, *don't* analyse it endlessly, *don't* require written paraphrases, *don't* just order the writing of poetry, don't prescribe topics, and *don't* imply that poetry can be tossed off without preparation or polishing. Instead, hasten slowly, working up a good feeling for poetry before moving into writing. You want poetry writing to become, not an occasional frill, but an accepted everyday possibility — creative and exciting, yes, but not unusual.

- *Example is the best teacher.* Show your enthusiasm for poetry: read them poems you like, make yourself a good reader, let them see your own continually growing anthology of favourites, put fine poems in their way, praise every genuine poetry writing effort, write poems with them sometimes and circulate yours with theirs. From all of this they will infer that you set a high standard and expect their best efforts.
- *Surround them with poetry.* Show them where poetry can be found in the school library, see there are many anthologies in the classroom library, not forgetting anthologies of poems written by children, make wall posters of short poems or striking stanzas, and . . .
- *Read poetry aloud as often as possible.* Try to read some poems every day, including many items from your growing collection of poems written by children themselves. 'I believe . . . that the period up to about eleven years of age constitutes a golden age for listening to poetry,' says the British language authority James Britton (*Language and Learning,* Pelican, 1972, p. 156). The children should also be drawn into the pleasures of collective verse-speaking—of classics like Belloc's 'Tarantella' and Auden's 'Night Mail' and many more recent, strongly rhythmic poems. We need to keep saying that sound is important in all writing and its prominence in poetry sharpens the ear and so benefits the rest of one's writing.
- *Arouse controversy about poems.* Ask, 'What is a good poem?' Have the children submit their choices. Argue about short controversial pieces like William Carlos Williams' 'The Red Wheelbarrow'. Work to produce a balance between a critical attitude and tolerance of different tastes.

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[1] Jesse Hise, for instance, in 'Writing Poetry: More Than a Frill', *English Journal* (N.C.T.E.), November, 1980, works from an 'anyone can write a poem' formula, beginning with nonsense poems, because they are 'totally non-threatening'. ('A comparison plus a wild dream plus an emotion equals a nonsense poem.')

- *Promote the collecting of favourite poems.* This is a natural offshoot of reading. Encourage the compiling of a personal anthology or at least the inclusion of self-chosen poems in the personal Journal. Or require the selection of a dozen or so poems for an anthology, to be compiled over the whole period of the year. (Incidentally, to copy a poem, writing it carefully and thoughtfully, is an excellent way to *read* that poem, for it draws the attention of eye and inner ear to things that are often missed whilst only reading.)
- *Show that many arts are related to poetry.* Poetry can be spoken, taped, dramatised, chanted, clapped, danced, painted and sung. In particular, show that poetry is close to song ('. . . no poem worth the name must ever be without at least the echo or the suggestion of a singing voice'—A.D. Hope) and that all songs need poetry. Not least, pop songs. Raise the question: 'What is a good song lyric?' Can they bring in some favourites? What results when most pop-song lyrics are stripped of their surrounding music?
- *Stir the poetic imagination.* Any or all of the influences above can stir the children's imagination, allowing them to glimpse new reaches of experience. They can feel poetry as a new, enticing power. Encourage them to learn the poems they like by heart. If imagination and experience are released in these ways, self-reliant learning will take over from teaching. Imagination, firing up, will awaken the form-creating power of the mind to suggest the outline of a poem.

2. Help each child to find responsive readers.

Writers need readers. Adult writers usually need to be assured of readers or they don't put pen to paper. Readers are their purpose for writing. And if we are to end the artificiality of school writing, we must help children to find real readers. They need them even before the writing begins, not only as an incentive to starting, but so they can *direct* what they have to say; they also need them during the writing, so that 'work in progress' can be tried out; and they need them at the end, for getting a thoughtful response which rewards the effort of writing and counts towards the attitude to the next piece.

No kind of school writing needs responsive readers more than poetry writing. Which readers, then, might the young poetry writers find helpful or stimulating? Fortunately, as we have seen (p. 51), whenever readers are sought they can be found—the most useful ones through some form of 'in-school publication'.

- *Self as Reader.* Writers often say they write their poetry without any readers in mind. The poems are products of a purely internal dialogue. If a reader later appreciates these poems then that is a happy coincidence but they would not modify their poetry if the reader were displeased. Some of these writers make no effort to publish their poems. The purpose was in the writing. Marty Feldman, indeed, after six weeks of editing a poem till he considers it right, then throws it away: 'My poems are of no significance to anybody else . . . I don't want to expose them' (*S.M.H.*, 19/8/1978). Clearly, if a child similarly wishes to write for self alone and does not wish to expose a poem then this wish should be respected.

- *An Ideal Reader. (Ideal Self?)* The Australian poet, A. D. Hope, says he usually tells inquirers that he does not have any particular readers in mind when he writes, *but* 'I say this not because it is really true but because it is too difficult to explain that mostly I have a perfectly definite reader in view, a reader who is more or less formulated or demanded by the poem, a reader who would like, fully comprehend and completely enter into this particular poem' (*The New Cratylus: Notes on the Craft of Poetry,* O.U.P., 1979, p. 106). A few children also seem to have such an ideal reader in mind.

- *Self as Student of Poetry.* Some children, hearing that poetry is studied and examined in the secondary school, will accept the proposition that *writing* poetry for oneself is more instructive than only *reading* it in however many lessons on 'poetry appreciation'; or, more fairly, that such lessons will mean more to someone who has experienced the writing. 'Ideally', declares Rachel McAlpine, 'the two should be closely associated. Every poem read by the class gives an opportunity to help them write better poems; every poem they write could be teaching them something about reading poems more sensitively.' (*Song in the Satchel: Poetry in the High School,* N.Z.C.E.R., 1980, p. 28.)

- *'Vanity' Readers.* Poetry more than any other form of writing prompts some adults to undertake the expense of publishing their own work or paying a publisher to do so when no publisher will otherwise accept it. These poets believe they have a message which readers 'out there' are waiting to hear. Some children too believe this and will exert themselves mightily to publish in a form that can be made available inexpensively to classmates or pupils at large.

- *In-school Readers.* Most children, while writing partly for their own satisfaction, are stimulated by forms of 'in-school publication'. This needs to mean more than having a poem pinned to a wallboard. The essence of publishing is to reach readers. The children need real, responsive readers, not casual 'viewers' or an anonymous 'audience'. So who can these readers be?

.. *the teacher,* responding to content as well as form
.. *parent aides,* whenever their help can be engaged
.. *a writing partner,* who can be consulted at any time
.. *a small group,* who regularly share their writing
.. *the whole class,* who discuss poems read aloud by the teacher
.. *the whole class,* as readers of a 'book' or pupils' poems
.. *another class,* as readers of such a 'book' sent as a gift
.. *a more junior class,* pleased to received poems from older pupils
.. *the school library,* receiving a 'book' of the class's best poems
.. *a school anthology of poetry,* likewise receiving contributions.

(N.B. See p. 46 for a full study of 'publishing' and 'response' together with reasons for concluding that we are entering a new era in school writing based on 'process' and 'in-school publication' which will be characterised by a genuine, universal movement towards excellence in children's writing.)

3. Help each child to find subjects for poems.

- *'Prefer to find your own subjects for poems.'* What other advice is possible? Of all the kinds of writing, poetry depends most heavily on strong personal feeling, and that is most likely to be aroused by a child's own experiences—past or present, at home or at school—rather than by the teacher's topics. But children who are not used to finding their own topics will look to the teacher for some help. Short of presenting a ready-made topic, the teacher may: talk the problem over in individual *conference* (see 'The Conference Approach', p. 121); provide the class with a wide range of *suggested topics;* or provide *experiences* believed likely to produce poetic inspiration. Let us explore this last course . . .

- *'Watch for a poetic inspiration!'* This is an unfailing discussion-starter. But what is inspiration? What is poetry? Asked to define 'poetry' even the greatest of all dictionary makers, Dr Samuel Johnson, was forced to exclaim, 'Why sir, it is much easier to say what it is not. We all know what light is; but it is not easy to *tell* what it is.'

So we can't expect definitions to help much. Wordsworth said poetry is 'emotion recollected in tranquillity.' That usefully puts feeling in a strong position. D. H. Lawrence said, ' . . . the essential quality of poetry is that it makes a new effort of attention and "discovers" a new world within the known world.' Which puts awareness, mental openness, in the prime position. Rather than pursue further definitions — there have been many!—it could be more profitable to follow Dr Johnson's thought that the children can *tell* poetry when they see or hear it. Try handing out poems on sheets: they can mark what they regard as specially poetic. A good discussion arises, not only about rhythm, rhyme, pictures, and figures of speech, but also about the individual spirit and meaning of each poem. 'How might this poem have come about?' Through strong feeling for some aspect of an experience—feeling, or 'emotion recollected in tranquillity', which prompted thoughts to flow and cluster until an inspiration, perhaps a fine first line, started the poem moving.

- *'I'll tell you how my inspirations come.'* Children are helped by a teacher who reveals his or her own experience of how-a-poem-happens. The present writer would say: 'We live a fast-moving existence bombarded ceaselessly by noise, media, people, a great *quantity* of stimulation. Always hurrying we are in danger of missing out on *quality* as we rush along barely able to speed-read the passing world. So when I feel something deeply I try to hold that feeling close to me till I get an inspiration for a poem. For example, after an early morning run on a beach, I . . .'

Or you might know anecdotes about the great poets. Here is that master of the short poem, A. E. Housman (1859-1936):

> I would go out for a walk of two or three hours. As I went along, thinking of nothing in particular . . . there would flow into my mind, with sudden and unaccountable emotion, sometimes a line or two or verse, sometimes a whole stanza at once, accompanied, not preceded, by a vague notion of the poem which they were destined to form part of . . . (in *The Creative Process*, ed. Brewster Ghiselin, Mentor, 1958, p. 91)

• *'Inspirations arise from experiences.'* Inspirations don't come at random. They arise when one is absorbed in an area of experience. Housman, for instance, was absorbed in the countryside of Shropshire. Every child has already had a wealth of experiences that can be drawn on. And the stream of experiences continues. Whether in the home or in the playground or in an active classroom, the child is constantly in touch with experiences that can trigger inspirations for poems.

Teachers don't need to devise super-dramatic or bizarre experiences for them, nor even cute ones like blowing bubbles or cuddling cats—though these or *any* experiences are not excluded. To begin with, the message of 'everydayness' is salutary: a wealth of everyday things, plants, creatures and people surrounds all of us, waiting to be noticed and valued. And beyond that, the classroom can provide new experiences galore.

Here for reference is a brief and general list of the kinds of commonly shared experiences teachers provide in a bid to encourage poetry writing:

- *Discussions.* 'What do you feel when . . .?' 'Do you get moody?' 'What is the happiest . . .?' 'Let's talk about dreams.' . . .
- *Books (and TV).* 'Are you currently enjoying a book (or program) — its action, characters, special incidents, description, anything?'
- *Word Play.* Play games with words, devise strings of alliterative words, write nonsense verse, chant couplets . . .
- *Free Writing.* Write without forethought, quickly or slowly, or simply doodle, till good phrases crop up; then use these to start a poem.
- *Sense Exploring. Listen* to mood music . . . *Look* at a scene or photo or painting . . . *Smell* flowers, crushed leaves . . . *Taste* a variety of foods . . . *Touch* specially 'feelable' objects . . . How many words can be attached to these and other sense impressions?
- *Outdoors.* A hot day, a windy playground, walking in the rain, a bushwalk, town traffic, window shopping, a rubbish tip . . .
- *Forms.* Shown one of the many forms of poetry (see p. 75), children can be asked to compose within it.

While any of these experiences *might* trigger a poem, individual children might equally be left uninspired. A different choice should always be open to them, including, on a 'down' day, prose. Let them for instance—indeed, encourage them—to write a vigorous paragraph, jumping straight into the subject with a bright opening sentence, saying what needs to be said without fancy adjectives, and ending with an effective sentence.

At the same time, care is needed to avoid a state of over-dependency on the teacher: 'I can't write a poem because you haven't provided a stimulating experience.' If poetry is to become a common occurrence—or not uncommon—then the whole environment of the classroom 'writing community' rather than a contrived stimulus should evoke it. Doubly true for the relatively spontaneous generation of poetry writing is the kind of classroom environment which Donald Graves' United States survey found to be productive of writing in general:

> Where writing flourished, it was but one of many forms of expression. Once personal expression was valued it popped up in many areas; it could not be contained by writing alone. Nor did writing succeed if it was but one form of expression. Drama, storytelling, music, painting, choral speaking, crafts of all sorts, movement and dance were in evidence . . . (*Language Arts*, N.C.T.E., May, 1978).

(4) Show the children the broad 'process' of poetry writing.

- *'There is no instant poetry!'* Children are usually surprised to learn that poets don't write instant poems in a fine flow of unbroken inspiration. The notion of 'process' needs to be applied as much to poetry as to other writing: poetry has to pass through stages of pre-writing preparation, drafting and revising, and polishing for publication. But to put this so baldly is to summarise the poet's fascinating craft in the dullest, most general terms. Far better to report what poets themselves say about their composing processes. For example . . .
- *Let's look at the way two poets write.*

A. E. HOUSMAN, in the quotation above, was speaking about his pre-writing stage, up to the point of inspiration. When he arrived home from that walk, he wrote down his inspired lines. Sometimes he would have to leave gaps, hoping they would be filled another day by further inspiration. If that didn't happen, '. . . the poem had to be taken in hand and completed by the brain . . . involving trial and disappointment, and sometimes ending in failure.' He tells of a four-line stanza which would not 'come': it had to be written and rewritten thirteen times during the course of more than a year before he considered it right (*op. cit.*, p. 91).

A. D. HOPE, the Australian poet, is even more explicit in his outstanding book on the poet's craft, *The New Cratylus* (*op.cit.* pp. 98-9). He sees 'fully spontaneous poems' as extreme instances and has himself never written one. Most poems have both 'spontaneous' and 'premeditated' elements. When reading, listening to music, digging in the garden or shaving, he may find that something triggers an idea which, with excited expectancy, he recognises as material for a poem. Then in a flash, or unfolding in a few seconds, 'the whole plan and structure and "feeling" of a possible poem presents itself'. From that point he might either make a note or start to compose. The rest may have to be deliberate invention ('routine carpenter's work') but varied elements often 'continue to well up' and these may even lead to alteration of the original plan. Usually, he says, 'I work slowly, piecemeal, trying alternatives, fitting, improvising, and often stopping because I cannot hit on the word or image which I feel is waiting just around the corner. Some poems, even quite short ones, are years a-growing.'

Children are greatly helped if the teachers who relate such composing experiences of the poets also share with them the joys and agonies of writing poems and report their own experiences. Indeed it is the commonplace of a good classroom 'writing community' to continually discuss composing. The long-term purpose of all the class's writing is to enable every child to get to know intimately his or her own 'process' in all its individuality.

- *'But what is poetic utterance?'* If the 'poetry' that emerges from children's earnest efforts turns out to be flat and dull, what can be done? First and foremost their ears (and 'inner ear') need to be accustomed to the sound of poetry, and this calls for abundant reading both *to* them and *by* them. Only that way will they catch a sense of poetry's distinctive liveliness. The writer-teacher Hughes Mearns was trying to capture this sense when he asked his pupils, 'Do you ever talk to yourself?' At once they were interested; yes, of course they did. 'Well, poetry is like talking to yourself!' It was no definition of poetry, just a will-o'-the-wisp half-truth that took hold of their imaginations and swept them into poetry writing . . . those vivid moments of talking to oneself, meaning-full, feeling-full, intimate, touched by drama.

'Everything written is as good as it is dramatic,' the American poet Robert Frost once asserted. Especially poetry! Frost himself continually sought to inject a dramatic 'tone of voice' into his poems. In an attempt to demonstrate this spirit of poetic utterance to schoolchildren he wrote three flat, prosy sentences on a blackboard:

> The cat is in the room.
> I will put the cat out.
> The cat will come back.

Then, declaring, 'All the fun's in how you say a thing', he rewrote the sentences to sound like speech with that touch of the dramatic which enters bright conversation:

> There's that cat got in.
> Out you go, you cat.
> What's the use. She'll be right back.

A. D. Hope says much the same: 'There is a sense in which a poem is a kind of conversation with an unknown person' (*ibid.*, p. 19). Everything, finally, depends on the sensitivity of the young poet's ear as he or she becomes absorbed in a talking-to-yourself 'conversation'.

- *'How important are the poetic forms'?* They are extremely important to young writers. We must surround these writers with examples of every possible poetic form. (For a wide range, see page 75.) Some poetry teachers go so far as to say that the main challenge in poetry teaching is not to provide more experiences but to help the child find forms through which they can successfully express aspects of the experiences they have already had in plenty.

- *'How much technique (craft) should we teach?'* Too many adults have wanted to create poetry without any effort. After initial hopeful excursions they have gone on failing for want of seriously working at technique, which is the skills, methods, craft that need to be applied to a shapeless mass of subject-matter in order to select elements and combine them so that they communicate vividly to the reader. The technique of a mature poet is complex. How much do children need? One can only answer tentatively, 'As much as they *currently* need.' This is not an evasion. There needs to be a growth in technical competence as children progress through the school. What follows is a minimum of technical knowledge that should be known by the teacher. Parts of it can be passed on to a child as he or she asks for help or reveals a need.

On no account should the whole of it be taught or drilled in abstract, apart from children's composing efforts.

> *Note on the Primary School Poetry Writer.* The 'process' idea, especially 'revising and polishing', should not be presented in a way that makes poetry writing seem time-consuming and difficult. Its intention is positive. For example, the draft poem of a young writer, produced in perhaps 15-20 minutes, will probably contain some clumsy elements such as a forced rhyme, a lapse of rhythm, an inappropriate image. The child almost certainly senses the weaknesses but may not be able to spot them and may simply conclude, 'I can't write poetry'. Assistance here from the teacher (or a writing partner) can be invaluable. Then a 10-minute revision can lift the poem to a better level.

.. **the base: 'process'.** The 'process' concept is immensely important for primary or secondary poetry writers because it provides a sound, easily grasped base of technique or craft. It explains that there are stages in the writing of a poem: a pre-writing experience out of which comes some kind of 'inspiration'; then perhaps, but not necessarily, a plan; followed by drafting, revising and polishing. All other technique can be built on repeated experience of this framework.

.. **rhythm.** Everyone understands that poetry is strongly rhythmic, and this relates it to the great natural rhythms which sway our lives: breathing and heartbeat, sleeping and waking, hunger and satisfaction, night and day, winter and summer . . .

> Rhythm is at the heart of poetry and when I seek, as I often do, to draw children's attention to the rhythm of a particular piece of verse, whether it is the children's own or other children's or adults', I will 'dum-dum-dee-dum', 'da-da-dit-dit-do' and wave my arms or hands up and down beating time. This sounds a bit odd, but I seem to get away with it. The arm movement is particularly helpful when, as sometimes happens, a child loses his poetic rhythm and drops into prose. One can readily indicate this by making the hand movement flatter and flatter. As the line becomes a sentence and loses its impetus, the hand moves sideways with less and less vertical movement until it becomes a straight line . . . It is not necessary to *teach* rhythm. What happens when children respond naturally to something they wish to write about, is that the rhythm follows the topic. (J. M. Thomson, 'Teaching Children to Write Poetry', *The New English—How To . . .*, P.E.T.A., 1976, p. 105.)

.. **metre.** Metre needs to be distinguished amidst the numerous rhythms of a poem. It is the poem's underlying pattern of repetition, which would become monotonous (like the mechanical beat of a metronome) if the *actual* rhythms of the poem did not introduce variations. Metre is sufficiently described to young children by showing the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables in the 'feet' or rising, falling and blended rhythms:

RISING . . . Behínd|him róde|two gáll|ant squíres,
of nób|le náme|and kníght|ly síres;

FALLING . . . Plúnder of|Ápril's|góld we|sóught,
Líttle of|Ápril's|ánger|thóught

BLENDED . . . Lóop up her|trésses (falling)
Escáped|from the cómb (rising)

.. **rhythms beyond metre.** All of Shakespeare's plays use the rising iambic pentameter (five feet) metre yet infinite *variations* of rhythm keep the plays from sounding monotonous. A poem's metre maintains a central presence, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, amongst the many other rhythms of the poem. The rhythms which vary from the metre are accorded by the poet a degree of freedom, a long lead as it were, so that at times they seem to amble, trot or frisk independently, yet they are finally unable to break completely free from the controlling metre. If they did, the poem would lose its patterned distinctiveness, becoming either prose or free verse. These errant rhythms that a sensitive ear may detect playing around the metre may be traced to many alternations, most of them subtle: stressed and less stressed syllables which depart from those of the metre; the sounds and pauses of speech; rises and falls in pitch (intonation); consonants and vowels; long and short syllables, consonants and vowels; soft and hard sounds; rhyme, usually at the end of lines but sometimes within lines; alliteration; assonance . . . and on top of all of these, the strong rhythmic influence of 'reading for sense', which is likely to downplay any too obvious manifestations of metre or other rhythms.

.. **rhyme.** Some teachers, despairing of children's contrived rhyme ('sledgehammer anti-poetry') have been heard to ban rhyme and even say, 'Good poets no longer use it'. But though rhyme did become unfashionable in 'free verse' quarters from the 1920s onward, many poets continued to use it and it is currently enjoying something of a return to fashion. Anyway, children enjoy rhyme so much, they are so steeped in it—through riddles, spells, nursery rhymes and counting rhymes, not to mention TV ads and pop songs — and they are so resolved that it is the very hallmark of poetry, that to ban it from the classroom is both unwise and ineffectual. Rather we can show that it is often not needed, that poets do not always use it, and that above all it should never be forced — instead, 'Always prefer the most *meaningful* word, while perhaps waiting to see if a better or equally meaningful rhyming word comes to mind.'

.. **free verse.** This term has had many interpreters. Its central meaning is verse freed from the constraint of metre. Thereby the poet is freed to vary line lengths and rhythms as desired—always, however, within the limits of what 'sounds poetic' to a sensitive ear. There is no regular rhyme, though occasional rhyme or hint of rhyme is not uncommon. Some teachers promote free verse believing it enables children to escape the excessive rigours of strict poetic form; others disagree, believing it tempts children to abandon the struggle for poetic utterance and to flatten their expression into prose. Every teacher must find a position between these viewpoints. Many authorities warn against seeing free verse as easy. At the very least it demands a dramatic tautness line by line and skill in arranging the whole poem on the page so that it appeals to the reader's eye.

.. **imagery.** This term, too, carries many meanings. It was at first applied to the 'mental pictures' summoned by a poem; but this meaning has broadened to include whatever recreates in the reader's mind any of the sensory aspects of the subject. (Indeed, it has been argued that every poem should be viewed as an image compounded of lesser images.) Some poetry achieves a dense texturing of imagery. Thus four senses are reached by Tennyson's two short lines:

> And many a rose-carnation feeds
> With summer spice the humming air.

Often, imagery has mistakenly been limited to 'figures of speech', especially metaphors (including similes, which are only metaphors introduced by 'like' or 'as') but it is also conveyed by literal description. In Ezra Pound's broad definition, imagery is 'a verbal concentration generating energy'; he also declared that 'the proper and perfect *symbol* is the natural object'. What is important for children is that they should become sensitive to all vivid imagery in a poem, whether figurative or literal. This is infinitely preferable to sending them on mechanical searches for similes and metaphors.

- *'Yes we teach it, no we don't . . .'* One very good teacher of poetry writing in primary schools tells us: 'Rhythm comes naturally. Rhyme isn't necessary. The imagery makes the difference. I talk a lot about images.' (J. M. Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 107.) He is in no doubt that what he is doing is *teaching* poetry.

On the other hand, another teacher of poetry, to older students, the poet Robert Gray, says, '. . . you cannot really teach anyone to write poetry; you can only teach them to write someone else's poetry . . . I am talking about poetry that has got something more than the merely good to it.' *(Sydney Morning Herald,* 27/6/1981)

Jim Thomson would see the point of this. Children do take over, consciously or unconsciously, the forms, metres and sometimes even the subjects of the poems they read or hear: a strong element of imitation is inevitable. But he would wish to add that gleams of originality—whether inspired or thoughtfully devised—can appear in children's verse from their earliest efforts.[2] 'Teaching' means encouraging the writing of poetry by every means, surrounding the young poets with the utmost variety of models, helping them find answers to craft problems, and nurturing every gleam of originality that shows.

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[2] There is plenty of evidence of this in writing from eight primary classrooms in *My Machine Makes Rainbows*, ed. R. D. Walshe (Longman Cheshire, 1972). The series of *Youth Writes* collections edited by Marcia Kirsten (Longman/Reed) shows much of the best of Australian secondary school poetry writing.

BASIC WRITING

Question 10

'How can I go about teaching Basic (formerly remedial) Writing?'

Basic, not remedial. Indeed, 'remedial writing' is an unacceptable term. It implies that the child is sick, whereas the truth is that the child either started in an environment unsympathetic to his or her learning problems or was turned off later by a bad experience. No medicine is called for. Like every other fairly normal human being this child is at some point on the continuum between 'beginning writer' and 'mature writer':

beginning
mature
X

Not very advanced! But still, this child is *there,* stuck at the point where, years ago, writing was made to seem fearfully hard . . . and now waiting to be shown how to take a step forward.

So let us establish the 'base' where this child's development as a writer stopped. That's not difficult. You don't need to look for an expert diagnostician, neither a linguist nor a psychoanalyst. Simply start talking to the child about writing. Show your interest. Implant a seed of hope. ('M-m-m, this teacher doesn't see any big problem, talks as if every kid can write, will soon have me writing like the others.') At a tactful moment, get some cheerful free-writing going. Whatever the child does reasonably well in this writing is that 'base'. You date and file this writing for future reference. From this base there will be continuing upward movement.

In the most authoritative book on turned-off writers, *Errors and Expectations,* Mina Shaughnessy says, 'I have reached the persuasion that underlies this book . . . that Basic Writers write the way they do, not because they are slow or non-verbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes' (p. 5; O.U.P., 1977).

Profile of the turned-off writer. An 'action research' project conducted by Tony Moore of Miller High School for the Sydney Teachers Writing Group produced a compelling profile of junior secondary 'BW' students. There was no evidence to suggest that they *naturally* lacked aptitude for writing, but plenty of evidence of emotional problems induced by home or school or both, aggravated by an accumulating sense of failure at school. Inquiries indicated that by age 8 (if not earlier) children can feel convinced of failure at writing — and this conviction seems destined to last a lifetime, *unless an enlightened and compassionate teacher takes things in hand.*

There had been years of low marks, nil or slight achievement, and declining general confidence: reading was down as well as writing, and so was performance in the various 'content subjects'. Teachers, looking in despair at the jumbled written work, usually concluded, 'They have no ideas.'

But deeper inquiry always discovered that they had had, and continue to have, significant outside-school experiences — *which they firmly believe the school is not interested in!* Somewhere along the educational line they had got a loud, clear message: you don't reveal your thoughts or expose your emotions to teachers. As a matter of fact, these children do express their experiences — but do so out of school, among neighbourhood friends and in the playground, and, they confess, in their daydreams. As Tony Moore observed; 'For what they want to say or can say, society has no ear; for what society wants them to be able to write, they have neither words nor thoughts.'

The four keys to teaching Basic Writing. Let's stop treating those turned-off writers like invalids or half-wits. Let's stop devising cute, special or supermotivated topics to interest them. Instead, *let's treat them as writers working from an earlier base than that of the rest of the class.* They need individual attention, but otherwise they need not be treated differently.

So the teacher works to see that these 'BW' writers, like all the other writers in the class, accept that writing is essential to learning and living. In terms of classroom 'strategies' this means that we need to work along four main lines of approach:

(1) fostering in them a willingness to write
(2) providing them with interested readers
(3) encouraging them to make a self-reliant choice of topics
(4) demonstrating to them a 'process' for 'getting writing right'.

These are specific applications to 'BW' writers of the four 'essential simplicities' of teaching and learning writing on which this book is based (see p. 13).[1] Separated here for convenience of discussion, these four strands will interweave in classroom practice. Let us now discuss each of them in relation to, say, 3-5 'BW' writers you have found in your new class . . .

1. Fostering a willingness to write.

These are turned-off writers. To them writing means agony and defeat. They try to avoid it, and if compelled to write they do so resentfully, inhibitedly, defensively, concerned chiefly to avoid error and finish quickly. What can a teacher do to produce a willingness to write? . . . Any or all of these things, expressed in appropriate language, at the tactful time, over a period:

- *Child as Person.* Above all, consider each of them as a sensitive child who underneath is suffering because of this difficulty with writing. Talk individually to them about their *feelings* regarding writing. Tell them that at times you too find writing 'hard'; and add, 'I *know* you'll be able to write well because experts (linguists) have proved that anyone who can talk is able to learn to write — it's exactly the same brain that does both jobs.'

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[1] The 'four main lines of approach' may also be checked for relevance against Jerome S. Bruner's four theorems which propose to specify what a theory of instruction should aim to do (see his *Towards a Theory of Instruction,* Norton, pp. 40-1): (1) corresponds to his 'experiences which most effectively implant in the individual a predisposition toward learning'; (2) to his 'rewards and punishments in the process of learning and teaching'; (3) to his 'ways in which a body of knowledge should be structured'; (4) to his 'most effective sequences in which to present the methods to be learned'.

- *Importance.* Explain the absolute importance of writing in all school learning, and also its many uses in a career and in adult life.
- *Environment.* Check to see the child has reason to feel that in this classroom there is plenty of time to write, there are supportive classmates who write and discuss writing, and there is no threat of heavy correction. (You may also have the assistance of parent-aides.)
- *Parallel Reading.* Indispensable is a parallel reading-for-pleasure program. Reading helps writing! On the other hand, as writing strengthens, it will in turn help the child's reading. Moreover, the class's writing creates a great deal of reading, while reading becomes a growing resource of ideas for writing.
- *Relaxed Writing.* Especially in the early stages, encourage all manner of non-threatening writing, including 'playing around with writing': forms of free writing, jotting of notes, keeping a journal/diary/logbook (private and unmarked, though you may read it if invited), etc. — till the pen is picked up without inhibitions.
- *Confidence Building.* Give them wins in everything touching writing. Confidence must be raised at all costs. No red-pencil correction, at least in the early stages. Express interest in their ideas/message, no matter how rough the expression temporarily is. ('You do know a lot about it — I can't wait to find out what happens!' etc.) Reassure them that writing is not tossed off easily by anyone. Write with them sometimes, and show that you always need to do some revising. Avoid teaching of skills separately as dull exercises; instead, always approach writing through the child's whole expression of a meaningful message, only then referring, if necessary, to specific skills that the child's performance shows to be in need of attention.
- *Continuous Support.* The typical BW writer is vulnerable when doing anything new or experimental, whether with content or form. Attention becomes so riveted on the new that there may be an apparent regression in an area, say of syntax or punctuation, where previously there had seemed to be control. The regression need only be temporary — unless an unsupportive classroom through censure forces the child back to safe and dull positions which will henceforth seem preferable to risking anything new. This writer needs continuous support from an understanding teacher.
- *Writing Brings Order.* These children tend to be the more mentally scattered ones. So the teacher brings order into their lives through the writing situation; that is, an ordered environment, an expected time for writing, an absence of distraction while writing, and the fact that writing is itself *composing,* not only on the page, but inwardly as well, both intellectually and emotionally.[2]

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[2] There is a considerable literature on the importance of writing as therapy. For a review of modern development in this area see 'Cure Your Neurosis for $5.00', by R.D. Walshe in *English in Australia* (A.A.T.E.), September, 1980.

2 Providing interested, responsive readers.

For years these 'BW' writers have had little reason to think that anyone could possibly be interested in anything they might write. So surprise them! Provide them with readers who set up a demand for their writing and respond to it:

- *Teacher as Reader.* Assure them you want to find out what they know and think by reading what they write. This is a big change—from 'teacher as marker' to 'teacher as reader'. As often as possible you 'conference' one-to-one with them, giving each more time than you give to each of your strong writers. Your response to a child's piece of writing will have a powerful effect on the attitude the child will bring to the next piece of writing. But this will also be true of response from peers.
- *Arrange a 'Writing Partner'.* Tactfully arrange a writing partner for the 'BW' writer, one who is writing well and will conscientiously 'show a few points' but will chiefly be a careful reader, responding to whatever is written. (This is emphatically *not* time wasted for the good writer—in such a relationship the 'teacher' always learns even more than the taught.) At the same time try to find strengths possessed by the 'BW' children—in art? craft? maths?—and partner them with children who are slower in those areas, so that they experience the satisfaction of being helpers to the helped.
- *Classmates as Readers.* At an appropriate time, ask the 'BW' writer to draft, revise and rewrite a small piece, perhaps with editorial help from the partner—then 'publish' this by having it *read* all around the class. A writing success! ('See, of course you can do it! You're on your way . . .') If the whole classroom is becoming a 'writing community', then the sharing of writing is accepted as normal and necessary. 'Sharing' means reading and response by the peer group—which is always a child's most compelling teacher.
- *Parent Aides as Readers.* Some 'BW' children flourish when an adult takes an interest in them. Here is a valuable role for parent aides, who will regularly confer with one or more of these children and 'commission' pieces of writing.
- *Explain the Role of a Reader.* Incidental to all the reading above is a clear explanation of the *special, significant role of a READER.* Different from a 'viewer' (passively watching) or 'listener' (able to interrupt and ask for a clearer explanation), a reader receives a final piece of writing and expects it to be clear. The words on the page must tell it all.

3. Encouraging self-reliant choice of topics.

The 'BW' writers will almost certainly ask you to provide a topic. They will probably also be ready to intimate with subtle body language or an unsubtle groan that whatever you suggest is an inhuman imposition. Don't oblige. Not even from the best of motives, nor in the knowledge that you have a brilliant 'surefire topic'. To spoonfeed with topics is to create an unwanted dependence which has nothing in common with writing in real conditions. Instead, explain that writing means making something of one's own problems or experiences or researches. Explain too that it is this kind of real writing that readers are looking for.

- *Help Them Choose.* While declining to set a topic, the teacher is very willing to listen to the child's interests and help to find a good topic among them. This is best done in individual 'conference' (see 'The Conference Approach', p. 121). When working in the so-called content areas of the curriculum the teacher will try to leave a range of choice within the prescribed, curriculum area (see 'Topics for Writing', p. 71).
- *Help Them Limit Their Topics.* Show them that writers never approach a topic 'in general' but concentrate on a specific aspect or viewpoint. (Not 'All about Camping' but 'My Christmas Camp' or 'Why I Like Camping'.)
- *Encourage Parallel Reading.* This can be a vital source of ideas. Such reading should extend from library books to writings by other pupils.
- *Help with Pre-writing.* Show again and again the value of pre-writing methods of gathering ideas, not only long-term notemaking, but discussion and brainstorming—perhaps also planning, though this is likely to appeal to more methodical workers than most of these 'BW' writers presently are. On no account should planning be imposed as a necessary step for everyone in the writing process: it suits some writers and not others.
- *Express Interest in Content.* Above all, strongly express interest in the content of each piece of writing on a self-chosen topic, thus confirming that the child has subjects within his or her experience that are worth writing about—subjects that will command the interest of readers.

4. Demonstrating a process for 'getting writing right'.
The 'BW' writers usually think that 'Other people can get writing right the first time—but not me, I'm stupid, and what I write is a mess.' So the teacher must show that all writers, even the professionals, don't 'get it right the first time', that they make use of *a learnable process of revising and polishing until it is indeed right.*

- *Writing Different from Talking.* The 'BW' writers almost invariably think they should be able to just start writing in the same way as they just start talking. Without forethought or preparation! Of course, one *can* do so on very well known everyday subjects, provided one's readers share some understanding of such subjects. But it needs to be demonstrated that the usual subject-matter of writing is less well known than this, and that we can't assume much or any understanding on the part of the readers. So most writing needs a 'pre-writing' stage.
- *Unlike Talking, Writing Is Best Seen as a Multi-stage Process.* Demonstrate and explain again and again the 'stages' idea: pre-writing/drafting/revising/rewriting. The beginning is in 'inner speech', the confused chatter of the everyday mind . . . the first draft tries to achieve clarity . . . but every writer needs to revise. Revising is the essence of writing. ('There is no such thing as good writing, only good rewriting.') Donald Graves and others have shown that children can begin revising from age 5-6 in small but significant ways. (See 'The Conference Approach', p. 121.)
- *Explain 'Pre-Writing'.* Instead of 'just picking up a pen and starting' (which is all right in 'free writing'), writers may ponder, or read, or make notes, or talk-it-over, anything that prompts the mind to focus on

the problem. This is where individual or group 'conference' can be so valuable. Valuable too, for some children, is the idea of 'rehearsing': keep bringing the problem back to mind, getting slants on it; or, with eyes closed, get story-pictures about it, as in daydreaming; or think about it before you go to sleep . . . Expect and wait for a 'lead', the opening sentence(s) that shows you the best way into the topic. Or write several leads, from different viewpoints, till you can say, 'This is it!'

- *Models Help.* If the children are regularly reading one another's writing, then model *forms*—of poetry, stories, articles, letters—will surround and guide the 'BW' writers. Another valuable model that should be passed around is the *revised writing* of children who have got the hang of revision, whether in the form of revision-on-the-page or a rewriting to which is attached the roughly revised draft.
- *Explain Drafting.* Most writers regard the first draft as the hardest stage. This needs to be explained. It is also the reason why first drafts need to be polished later. We should allow the children to concentrate during the drafting on getting their *meaning* into some shape, without attending to the separate focus of 'correctness'. Accept their language at this stage, knowing that a tidying up will come later. When the draft is done, perhaps after a swift read-back, give this advice: 'Put your draft aside and come back to it fresh tomorrow. Then you will see it more clearly—and you'll find revising easier than the drafting.' (N.B. Much of any child's writing will not be carried beyond first draft, but a proportion of 'fully-authored' writing on self-chosen topics will regularly be moving through the full process of preparation for publication to real readers.)
- *Explain Revising.* Say that the writing partner as well as the teacher will at first help the 'BW' write to 'edit' a piece for publication. ('Exactly in the way that every writer from Patrick White downward has an editor who prepares the manuscript for publication.') Make use here of the many ideas elsewhere in this book, especially in the section on 'Revising' (p. 37).
- *Explain Post-writing.* This is a term for the teacher rather than the child. It covers 'publication', 'reading', and 'response': *publish* in a manner attractive to the intended readers; provide time for interested and constructively critical *reading;* convey a helpful *response* to the writer. Explain how writers need readers. (See 'Publishing', p. 46.) For the rest, the whole class should regularly swap experiences of the composing process, each child can keep a page headed 'Things I Have Learnt about My Writing', and all writing will be kept in a folder so that progress can periodically be noted.

To sum up. These 'Four Keys to Teaching Basic Writing' prove to be only a specific application of the essential principles of teaching writing to anyone. The 'BW' writers are treated as normal, but lagging temporarily in this one area of human achievement; so they are given rather more of a teacher's time than is given to other children, and may also be assisted by parent-aides.

PART VI

Six Special Studies

One

STANDARDS FOR WRITING

Standards for Basic Skills Writing Programs

This important statement was prepared at the request of the United States Office of Education by a committee of the U.S. National Council of Teachers of English — R.D.W.

The following standards were developed by a specially selected committee of teachers, supervisors, and writing specialists for use by states and school districts establishing comprehensive literacy plans. The National Council of Teachers of English urges study of these standards as a means of determining that plans attend not only to effective practice within the classroom but also to the environment of support for writing instruction throughout the school and the community. If effective instruction in writing is to be achieved, all the standards need to be studied and provided for in shaping comprehensive literacy plans.

At a time of growing concern for the quality of writing in the society, it is important to take the most effective approaches to quality in school writing programs. These standards will help states and school districts assure that efforts to be undertaken will indeed lead to improvement.

Planners must begin with an adequate conception of what writing is. To serve this purpose, we offer the following:

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF WRITING

Writing is the process of selecting, combining, arranging, and developing ideas in effective sentences, paragraphs, and, often, longer units of discourse. The process requires the writer to cope with a number of variables: *method of development* (narrating, explaining, describing, reporting, and persuading); *tone* (from very personal to quite formal); *form* (from a limerick to a formal letter to a long research report); *purpose* (from discovering and expressing personal feelings and values to conducting the impersonal 'business' of everyday life); *possible audiences* (oneself, classmates, a teacher, 'the world'). Learning to write and to write increasingly well involves developing increasing skill and sensitivity in selecting from and combining these variables to shape particular messages. It also involves learning to conform to conventions of the printed language, appropriate to the age of the writer and to the form, purpose, and tone of the message.

Beyond the pragmatic purpose of shaping messages to others, writing can be a means of self-discovery, of finding out what we believe, know, and cannot find words or circumstances to say to others. Writing can be a deeply personal act of shaping our perception of the world and our relationships to people and things in that world. Thus, writing serves both public and personal needs of students, and it warrants the full, generous, and continuing effort of all teachers.

An effective basic skills program in writing has the following characteristics:

TEACHING AND LEARNING

1. There is evidence that knowledge of current theory and research in writing has been sought and applied in developing the writing program.
2. Writing instruction is a substantial and clearly identified part of an integrated English language arts curriculum.
3. Writing is called for in other subject matters across the curriculum.
4. The subject matter of writing has its richest source in the students' personal, social, and academic interests and experiences.
5. Students write in many forms (e.g. essays, notes, summaries, poems, letters, stories, reports, scripts, journals).
6. Students write for a variety of audiences (e.g. self, classmates, the community, the teacher) to learn that approaches vary as audiences vary.
7. Students write for a wide range of purposes (e.g. to inform, to persuade, to express the self, to explore, to clarify thinking).
8. Class time is devoted to all aspects of the writing process: generating ideas, drafting, revising, and editing.
9. All students receive instruction in both (a) developing and expressing ideas and (b) using the conventions of edited American English.
10. Control of the conventions of edited American English (supporting skills such as spelling, handwriting, punctuation, and grammatical usage) is developed primarily during the writing process and secondarily through related exercises.
11. Students receive constructive responses—from the teacher and from others—at various stages in the writing process.
12. Evaluation of individual writing growth:
    (a) is based on complete pieces of writing;
    (b) reflects informed judgments, first, about clarity and content and then about conventions of spelling, mechanics, and usage;
    (c) includes regular responses to individual pieces of student writing as well as periodic assessment measuring growth over a period of time.

SUPPORT

13. Teachers with major responsibility for writing instruction receive continuing education reflecting current knowledge about the teaching of writing.
14. Teachers of other subjects receive information and training in ways to make use of and respond to writing in their classes.
15. Parent and community groups are informed about the writing program and about ways in which they can support it.
16. School and class schedules provide sufficient time to assure that the writing process is thoroughly pursued.

17. Teachers and students have access to and make regular use of a wide range of resources (e.g. library services, media, teaching materials, duplicating facilities, supplies) for support of the writing program.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

18. Evaluation of the writing program focuses on pre- and post-program sampling of complete pieces of writing, utilising a recognised procedure (e.g. ETS holistic rating, the Diederich scale, primary trait scoring) to arrive at reliable judgment about the quality of the program.
19. Evaluation of the program might also include assessment of a sample of student attitudes; gathering of pertinent quantitative data (e.g. frequency of student writing, time devoted to writing activities); and observational data (evidence of prewriting activities, class anthologies, writing folders, and student writing displays).

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Two

CRAFT HINTS FOR YOUNG WRITERS

Writing Wrinkles

by LAUREL DUMBRELL
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1. Be a sponge and soak up everything from everyday experience: observations conversations, insights. Never dismiss daily life as ordinary; a writer's job is to find the new in the 'ordinary'.

2. Tune in to your feelings and record them—whether they're expansive, optimistic, elated or lonely, depressed, fearful. Writers are explorers of inner as well as outer space.

3. Keep a pen handy to catch not only your inspirations but those 'unexpecteds' that occur when you're casting round with a writer's eye.

4. Be specific! It is Rule One of good writing. Don't say 'a bird' if you mean 'a swallow'; don't say 'it flew' if in fact it swooped. Only by using specifics can you make your reader *see*.

5. Love reading. Apart from life itself, reading is the writer's great source of ideas. It is also the writer's main guide to literary form and main instructor in the shape and rhythm of written sentences.

6. Prepare solidly. Experience, read, research, think, make notes. Good writers write from abundance. Plan too, if that is your method. But be ready to have the writing lead you in unintended directions. Writing tends to 'find it own meaning', tends to 'rebel against intent'.

7. Write every day. Only this will bring you fluency. In particular, keep a writer's journal, in which you track your experiences, your inner life, your growing involvement with writing. You need a place to reflect on your writing process, on how-writing-happens for you.

8. Find, if you can, a special person who will read and comment on your writing—better still, a 'writing partner' who exchanges writing with you. Writers need readers. You need to feel as you write that you are attracting and holding a real person or persons, and that they will respond in due course to what you say.

9. Revise. Leave personal writing in first draft, but redraft and polish everything else; for good writing is always rewritten writing. Set yourself a high standard—only to be achieved by revising. That's what novelist Ernest Hemingway had in mind when he said: 'You learn to write by applying the seat of the pants to a chair.'

10. Gather every tip you can on the why and how of writing. Not only on technique. Writers neither overstress nor understress technique. They know that life, an idea or a problem must come first and then it is time to consider technique. Here's a starting sample of writers' tips . . .

• What Writers Say about Their Writing

H.W. & F.G. Fowler: 'Any one who wishes to become a good writer should endeavour before he allows himself to be tempted by the more showy qualities, to be direct, simple, brief, vigorous, and lucid.'

Joseph Conrad: 'My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*—and no more, and it is everything.'

J.D. Ratcliff: 'When I finish a first draft, it's so bad it wouldn't get D in a High School English course. Then I rewrite, usually about six times. It's a tedious process, but I finally get the words that I want.'

John Gardner: [Do you loathe rewriting?] 'I like it very much. It's my favourite part. I rewrite all the time. That's my main technique . . . I may do thirty readings on a single draft, changing it. But I'm absolutely convinced that the whole art of fiction is rewrites.'

Henry Miller: 'Writing, like life itself, is a voyage of discovery . . . Every man has his own destiny: the imperative is to follow it, to accept it, no matter where it may lead him. Often I put down things which I do not understand myself, secure in the knowledge that later they will become clear and meaningful to me.'

Keith Antill: 'Writing to me is a way of thinking through problems, of clarifying the turmoil of my thoughts.'

Graham Greene: 'Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human condition.'

Llewelyn Powys: 'I consider the greatest difficulty to be overcome by immature, untrained writers is lack of confidence. They are too selfconscious. When once the pen is in the hand it is important to forget about the opinion of others and to write away after your own fashion with careless, proud indifference.'

Three

TEACHING SPELLING

Understanding and Teaching Spelling

by ROYCE HOLLIDAY, Council Member, P.E.T.A.

When we look at spellings we automatically check their correctness. We live with the notion of 'correctness'. Many of us go so far as to use 'correct' spelling as a measure of literacy, of education, even of personal worth.

What is 'correct' spelling?

The technical word for 'correct' or 'conventional' or 'standard' spelling, *orthography,* comes from two Greek roots and means literally 'right writing'. What exactly is 'correct spelling'? It has been defined as a standard way of writing the language, which is accepted (with some slight variations) all over the world as the 'right way' to spell, no matter what the English it represents sounds like. (5:26).

Non-standard spellings are sometimes used in published writing and can often be more successful than standard spelling in representing the colour and sound of a dialect:

> Nah Jooab's middlin' thick like, bur e'd a'ad ad to
> be a deeal thicker ta know ut ther wer summat
> wrang t'way ut shoo wer preychin' on an' so 'e late
> paper tummel ontut fooar . . . (6:25)

Can we say whether this is correct spelling or not? Or, indeed, what do we feel about the following representation of the way some Australians allegedly speak?

> Aorta stop all these transistors from cummer ninner
> the country. Look what they're doone to the weather.
> All this rine! Doan tell me it's not all these
> transistors — an all these hydrigen bombs too.
> Aorta stoppem! (7:12)

Most of us would regard the spellings in these examples as non-standard, or incorrect. We might even think that they suggest a lack of formal education in the speller, since they could imply an ignorance of orthography. Yet they are undoubtedly more effective in representing the ways people speak than 'standard' or 'correct' spelling would be.

Throughout the English-speaking world there is a multiplicity of pronunciations of English, but there is also a shared world-wide English orthography. An advantage of this is that people who use different dialects or pronunciations can still communicate through the written word.

Small variations in this orthography don't matter. Differences between British and American spellings are slight and relatively few; moreover none of them undermine meaning. Thus we have no trouble with 'centre-center', 'gaol-jail', 'levelled-leveled'. In fact, similar variations are current *within* each of these two major English-speaking communities; for instance, in the spellings of 'judgment-judgement', 'connection-connexion', 'tyre-tire', 'programme-program'. (6:27)

Beginning spellers, understandably, rely very heavily on the ways they say words and on their knowledge of the letters of the alphabet and the sounds these represent; indeed, they usually act on the assumption that there is a simple one-to-one relationship between sound and written symbol. But this belief soon gives way to a realisation that while there certainly are many sound-to-spelling correspondences there are also many exceptions.

When the young writer is not compelled to 'learn' spelling mechanically, by mere copying of lists of words, but is involved in writing about subjects of real personal interest, he or she will attempt 'invented spellings'. These will inevitably be rooted in the simplistic 'spell as it sounds' approach, but will increasingly show modifications arising from understanding of 'correct', standard spellings which are continually being encountered in reading and writing. Within the large area of exceptions from simple sound-to-spelling correspondences, the child notices—and is helped by the teacher to notice—certain regularities or recurrences in the position of letters and letter-clusters in words.

Recognition of these regularities is an important skill. Children come to see that sequences such as *ough, tion, ous,* and *ph* are common and permissible in English while, for example, *strc, prst,* and *skrz* are not (they are common in the Czech language). No good purpose is served by insisting too early on a knowledge of these regularities. Far better to allow children time to develop their own insights into the English spelling system, especially through a period of invented spelling. In this way we follow Piaget's principle that 'children have real understanding only of that which they invent themselves, and each time we try to teach them something too quickly, we keep them from re-inventing it themselves'.

The case for 'invented spelling'

Charles Read's pioneering study (2) of the ways in which young children write and spell points to the value of a period of acceptance or tolerance of spellings that are incorrect by the standards of the conventional writing system. His study suggests:

1. Children who were able to invent their own spellings 'learned the conventional names of letters at a relatively early age (and) seemed to have inferred that letters represent sounds, and at least one of the sounds represented by a letter is usually contained in the name of that letter'. (2:330)
2. Some children write before they read, using invented spellings. 'In that respect this is a case of production preceding comprehension.' (2:330)
3. When a child tried to represent sounds as writing, 'apparently on the basis of what the words sounded like to him and his knowledge of the letter names', he was faced with a particular problem: there were not enough letters in the alphabet to represent all the sounds the child could distinguish. In solving this problem, a child has four choices: (a) give up systematic spelling, leaving out puzzling sounds or inserting any letter at all; (b) make up new symbols, creating a phonetic alphabet of one's own; (c) ask for adult spelling; (d) relate sounds on some basis,

using known spellings for more than one sound. 'It is this last choice that is both typical and revealing.' (2:331)

4. The children 'did get information from adults usually when they asked for specific spellings'. (2:332)

In summary, Read pointed out that children in this study invented their own spellings by relating the sounds as they heard them to the letter names that they knew: 'These interesting results differ sharply from standard spelling and are therefore unlikely to have been learned from adults. They are consistent and have plausible phonetic bases; in short, they reflect the children's own judgments of phonological relationships.' (2:332)

Invented spellings appeared one to three years before children entered school and these spellings were gradually replaced by standard spellings, usually as the child received formal instruction in reading and writing.

Carol Chomsky asks and answers an important question:

> But what about the effects of all these misspellings on the children's ability to learn to spell correctly later on? A recent study is reassuring in this regard. Standardised tests (California Achievement Test, spelling subtest) taken by a group of children who had spelled inventively all through the first grade showed grade-level scores in second grade, and above grade-level scores in third grade. Obviously, these kids were not held back from learning to spell conventionally by their unusual experience. (3:37)

She further reassures us by suggesting that if we involve children in writing (even before reading) and inventing their own spellings, they will view the written word as being something that belongs to them, as a means of expressing what they perceive. Written language is from the start systematic and accessible to them and they expect to take an active role in dealing with it. Learning conventional spellings becomes a natural and meaningful part of this active role: 'For, once you have invented your own spelling system, dealing with the conventional system comes easy. You've got the principle and you've already done a good bit of the intellectual work.' (3:37)

Here are four examples of a child's growth from her own invented spellings to conventional spellings (taken from examples arising out of the work being done by Donald Graves at the University of New Hampshire):

Date	**spelling**	**Date**	**spelling**
24/1	AKT — asked	6/11	NET — neat
20/3	ASKT		NAET
10/4	ASKED	7/11	NET
7/11	GON — gone	15/11	NET
29/11	GON	29/11	NEAT
15/12	GOEN		
25/1	GONE	6/11	HOL — whole
27/2	GONE	18/1	WHOO
3/4	GONE	16/5	WHOLE

This approach to writing and spelling challenges two old beliefs: first, that children can't write before they read, and second, that there is only one form of 'correct' spelling and that is the conventional form which should be required from the beginning and at all times.

Spelling only partly follows sound
Several writers have expressed this opinion, for instance, that it is misleading 'to talk of letters as being pronounced or sound as being written' (1:11) and 'It is not basically the function of spelling to represent sounds but to represent meaning.' (14:64). With spelling, the meaning is *seen:* Spelling is a part of Writing, which is for Reading. Children, in their early attempts to master the writing system, naturally try to spell by using the letters of the alphabet to represent the sounds of their speech. But none of the world's many alphabetic writing systems has been able to represent spoken language precisely. This means that 'correct' or conventional spelling is always partly sound-based (i.e. phonetic) *and partly not*. The part that is not phonetic has arisen historically, from a number of causes. Here are some:

1. **More sounds than letters.** The 26 letters of the English alphabet obviously cannot represent exactly the 44 major sounds of English speech. Moreover, 'a listener who is trained to discern minute differences between sounds can make finer and finer distinctions and identify an almost infinite set of types of sounds occurring in the speech of any individual'. (8:128) For example, even though we may be taught there is one sound for *l*, 'it is possible to notice variations within each single "sound" in the five words: *l*ook bu*l*b hea*l*th app*l*e p*l*ay' (8:128). As the pronunciation of words has changed across the centuries we have been left with spellings that tried to represent pronunciations now superseded — this partly accounts for the six different sounds of *ough* in *tough, cough, bough, though, through, thorough*.

2. **Spelling must rise above pronunciation differences.** Dialects, and there are many of them in English, differ considerably in pronunciation one from another. And within each dialect every individual pronounces some words rather distinctively. The spelling of English has to be recognisable across the vast diversity of all these pronunciations. Hence the need for a 'standard' or 'conventional' form of spelling—such as the one we have, which has arisen historically.

3. **Efficient reading depends on predictable spelling.** If spelling were either arbitrary or completely phonetic we would find that it slowed down our reading. Reading depends on ability to predict letter-clusters on the basis of our past experience with the particular word or related words. Spellings that depart markedly from the current conventions interfere with preediction and theirfor with flooent reeding.(!)

4. **Words that share meanings should look alike.** Meaning as well as sound has an important influence on spelling. Words that share meanings need to look alike. For example, there is a wide divergence of sound between the following words and yet their similar spellings link them for us unmistakably: 'extreme-extremity', 'wide-width', 'phone-phonic', 'clean-cleanliness'. If these were spelt so as to represent the ways they are spoken ('clean-clenliness'), then the *visible meaning-relationships* would be lost.

5. Homophones need to be spelt differently. English contains many homophones and near homophones—that is, words of the same or similar sound but having different meanings and spellings, e.g. 'none-nun', 'their-there', 'buy-by', 'two-too-to'. Obviously a phonetic spelling of these words would produce the same spelling for such words, even though the meanings differ. Reading would lose a valuable aid, in that at present words that have similar or related meanings often look alike and words that have different meanings often look different.

6. English readily absorbs foreign words. No language excels English in the absorption of foreign words. In doing so it sometimes adopts and sometimes adapts the foreign spelling, invariably preserving the distinctive flavour of the borrowed word.

Clearly, then, there are good reasons why our spelling system is not only related to basic units of sound (phonemes) but is also strongly related to basic units of meaning (morphemes). As Venezky says, whatever may have been 'the relationship between writing and sound when the first Old English writings were inscribed in Latin script and whatever may have been the reason for the subsequent development of this system . . .' the present orthography represents a relationship 'wherein phoneme and morpheme share leading roles'. (15:77)

What about spelling reform?

Spelling reformers seem typically to focus on the sounds rather than the meanings of our language, and in doing so are faced with the difficulty of deciding whose sounds to use. As Frank Smith says, if any particular system of spelling reform were to try to provide an exact written representation of all the sounds of speech 'every different speaker would spell words in a different way':

> The opinion of linguists who have made an intensive study of the relationships among spelling, speech and meaning is quite unequivocal: the present spelling of English offers the best system for unambiguous representation of meaning for all the various dialects of spoken English that exist.
>
> It is a mistake to think that the 'rationalization' of spelling would help even in the teaching of reading. Such a change would be regarded as useful only by those people who maintain that the main purpose of reading is to decode letters to sounds and that comprehension is a secondary consideration. (14:66)

How children learn to spell

In spelling, as in all other areas of learning, we must not expect a child to perform 'correctly' all at once. When we remind ourselves that conventional spelling ability grows, and just doesn't happen suddenly, it is likely we will look upon non-conventional attempts not as 'errors' but as spellings which simply represent a stage of understanding and development. In this sense, a child's unconventional spelling is 'correct' if it is a logical or plausible attempt by the child at that child's stage of development.

The teacher's role is to recognise and accept this stage and to help the student develop to the point where conventional spellings can be used independently by the student. By encouraging the student to read and to write abundantly, and by drawing the student's attention to the conventional spellings of words, this development will be assisted.

Although 'only a few educational researchers have investigated invented spelling' (11:42) there is compelling evidence from this research that by involving children in writing and in inventing spellings from the beginning we discover that:

- .. children can write and then read their own writing at a very early age;
- .. children can spell from an early age in ways that show they have a grasp of basic sound-symbol relationships;
- .. children can develop self-reliance, confidence, competence and an enjoyment of writing if we allow them to write about things which they personally find of value and if we encourage them at the same time to try their own spellings;
- .. children can develop as competent conventional spellers if we relax and accept that they must be allowed to manipulate the written language for themselves.

Notes: Towards a Spelling Program

What implications for teaching can we draw from the discussion above? A balanced program must (1) explain spelling, (2) enthuse the spellers, (3) integrate spelling with other work, (4) show there is a time when writing to consider spelling, (5) provide helpful advice on matters of detail. Let us look at each of these.

1. Explain the nature and importance of spelling. Teacher, child and parents need to understand spelling:

- .. that eventually, and for publication, 'correct spelling' means conformity with the spelling that is conventional to world-wide standard written English;
- .. that there are excellent reasons for this standard spelling; it facilitates communication across dialects and pronunications, and it helps convey meaning within a dialect;
- .. that variations from the standard are acceptable when deliberately capturing the character of a dialect;
- .. that a relatively small number of alternative spellings exist *within* the standard and are considered equally correct provided a chosen alternative is used consistently within one piece of writing (e.g. colour/color, programme/program);
- .. that spelling is subordinate to written expression as a whole, that the best of spellers occasionally make slips, and that spelling should not be regarded as a principal measure of literacy;
- .. that spelling does not equal speech; spelling is for writing, and through writing, meanings are conveyed to readers;
- .. that non-conventional attempts to spell can rightly be regarded as 'correct' spellings, although these need to gradually change until they are conventional spellings;
- .. that in helping the child spell, we should focus on spelling successes and be supportive of the child's efforts to develop conventional spelling skills.

2. Encourage children to be willing spellers. A child's positive self-image is fundamental to spelling success. This will be the teacher's guiding thought in providing a classroom environment that influences children to value good spelling. Knowing that 'spelling is for writing', the teacher will not make a fetish of spelling. The child must feel that his or her writing has value in the teacher's eyes *for its meaning* and that this is never outweighed by criticism of mechanical issues such as spelling. Moreover, the teacher will know that ability to spell is subject to stages of growth and will vary from individual to individual. Other key aspects of a favourable classroom environment are:

.. the teacher sets an example as a careful speller, including demonstrating that even teachers look up spellings in dictionaries;
.. dictionaries are available and their use continually encouraged;
.. careful spelling is continually praised;
.. students support each other in their quest for standard spellings;
.. centrally, there is an abundance of cheerful reading, writing, handwriting . . .

3. Integrate spelling with reading, writing, handwriting. Since spelling, by majority opinion, is more 'caught' than 'taught', the teacher's most important single spelling strategy will be an apparently indirect one: to provide an abundance of reading, writing and handwriting that is carried out in good spirit by the children. Within these activities, most of their *learning* of spelling will be going on unconsciously, subconsciously or consciously:

.. *reading* means that the mind is registering impressions of standard spellings; reading is fundamentally a process of *recognition* which can aid in the visual memory of spellings;
.. *writing* means bringing our impressions of spellings into conscious focus and pondering letters, syllables, probable letter sequences, etc.; spelling is fundamentally a process of *recall* through *writing*;
.. *handwriting* means psycho-physical activity which intimately copes with spellings, 'feeling' the letter sequences and meaning segments through (one hopes!) easy, fluid handwriting movements;
.. the more closely the total 'spelling program' relates to the class's reading, writing and handwriting, the more effective it will be, and any specific spelling exercises can be derived from those sources (e.g. from their *reading*, children can observe and note the features of difficult spellings; from *writing*, they can make lists of errors; and from both reading and writing, they can make lists of common letter clusters, such as prefixes and suffixes, for practice in *handwriting*).

4. Show that spelling needs to find an appropriate place in the process of writing. Spelling is for writing (just as writing is for reading). The way spelling is handled by the child will depend heavily on how the child is taught to write. If writing is taught by expecting the child to write coherently in one-off drafts on teacher-prescribed topics, then the child must try to spell correctly while writing, and this will distract attention from expressing meaning. This, with a few minutes of 'proofreading' at the end, was the traditional 'composition' method. Now there is an understanding that writing is much the better for being treated as a multi-stage 'process', and that each child needs to be given control or 'ownership' of the content, form and pace of his or her writing. The implications of this are sweeping—and not least for spelling! As each child practises writing across the years of schooling, acquiring understanding of his or her individual style of 'process', there is a growing understanding of when and how best to attend to spelling. For most writers the best time is when the writing is to be finalised for the readers, not at the draft stage. The draft, after all, should concentrate on getting the content or 'message' clear, and it can therefore be in relatively careless handwriting with crossings-out, carets and arrows—*and* first-effort spellings. Later, in revision, and especially in a final 'polishing for publication', the spelling can be considered very carefully, if necessary with dictionary in hand.

5. Detailed advice, tips and wrinkles about spelling. Here are ten tips which can help develop spelling ability:

- *'Improve handwriting'.* The ability to produce automatic, easy handwriting movements can help spelling by allowing the writer to write letter sequences and meaning segments easily instead of concentrating on individual letter formation. When such automatic movements are developed the first letter of a sequence of letters will trigger off a chain reaction in much the same way as a typist types *t-h-e* as one integrated movement triggered by the *t*. Practising common small words and letter sequences will help.
- *'Watch for letter patterns.'* Draw attention to recurring letter sequences or patterns. Reading imparts an unconscious sense of many such sequences, e.g. *ch, ee, ea, ph, qu*; and longer sequences, e.g. *ing, ong, ough, ould, ounce.* A developing knowledge of the probability of certain letter combinations occurring and of their likely positions in words will help (e.g. the 'f' sound at the beginning of a word will likely be the letter *f*, or cluster *ph—not gh*—such probabilities are the best generalisations or 'rules' to know.
- *'Watch for meaning units.'* The technical word for these is 'morphemes', minimal units of meaning. They need to be distinguished from both word and syllable though at times a word or a syllable may be a morpheme, e.g. the whole word *elephant* is a single morpheme, but *revived* contains three morphemes, the first meaning 'again', the second 'alive', and third 'past tense'. The more obvious morphemes can be the subject of continual discussion, especially frequently recurring roots and affixes (prefixes and suffixes). It helps, for example, to know that *un* means 'not', for then we will write 'unnecessary', not 'unecessary'. Or, if we know that *s* shows plurality we are unlikely to spell 'carz', even though that is the way we say the word.
- *'Using standard pronunciations can help.'* There is a relationship, limited it is true, between the way we say words and the way we spell them. So encourage clear articulation, sometimes helping children to hear standard pronunciation. (A child who says 'filum' for 'film' may spell it that way.) But don't overstress the sound-letter relationship, because seeing is even more important in spelling than hearing.
- *'Think of a related spelling.'* In doubt about a spelling, try thinking of a word you know that contains the same root. Thus *'clean'* can help with 'cleanliness', 'signal' with 'sign'. If we can't decide between 'compliment' and 'complement' but know that the word we want has the sense of 'complete', then complement is the right word.

- *'Have a go!'* Do everything possible to break down inhibitions about spelling. Say, 'Don't hesitate too long, but write it down—have a go! That way you discover and remember what it *feels* like as you write it and, above all, what it *looks* like.' Visual memory and the *feel* of writing spellings are thus given a chance.
- *'Here's a learning method.'* For learning the spelling of difficult words, suggest this method: (1) EXAMINE the word for features that may help (e.g. affixes, roots, even syllables); (2) COVER the word; (3) VISUALISE the word; (4) WRITE the word; (5) CHECK the spelling. This method is greatly superior to merely copying the word since it can help develop the power of recall which is crucial to spelling.
- *'Consult an authority'.* Dictionaries need to be readily available in the classroom at all times. (The small differences between British, American and Australian dictionaries need to be explained.) If a child's writing is flowing, why not provide a requested spelling to save looking it up?
- *'Mould the words.'* The student, at any level, should develop the attitude that words can be moulded as clay is for a pot. We can throw an idea on the page, shape it and reshape it until it says what we want it to say and what it leads us to say. 'Wrong' spellings at the early stages of moulding will not be seen as a shame if this attitude is adopted. The final 'tidying up' of the piece of writing, ready for publication, will necessarily require the use of conventional spellings where they have been missed. In the meantime free, honest writing will have been accomplished.
- *'Keep a personal spelling reference book.'* Into this will go difficult words and corrected spellings. The book needs to be periodically checked by the teacher.

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Four

MULTICULTURAL

Writing in Multicultural Australia

by I. JOHNSTON, P. W. MATTHEWS, E. W. VINE and J. GILMORE-SMITH

Introduction

Children's writing does not take place in a vacuum. Rather, it takes place within the confines of the curriculum and within a wider philosophical stance about the nature of the society in which the writing is being undertaken.

In common with most curriculum areas in Australian schools, writing has in the past been basically monocultural in orientation. This may well have been appropriate during the times when 'White Australia' and assimilationist policies were Australia's national cultural policies, i.e. when education was geared to turning everyone, irrespective of ethnic background, into what can be referred to as an 'Anglo-Australian'. However, those days are gone and nowadays almost all education systems (government and Catholic) and independent schools have multicultural education policies that deal realistically and positively with the multicultural nature of Australian society.

Such policies generally recognise three categories of Australian students, those:

(a) of Aboriginal descent;
(b) from English-speaking ethnic groups (e.g. English-Australians, Cornish-Australians, Canadian-Australians, and Scottish-Australians); and
(c) from non-English-speaking ethnic groups (e.g. Albanian-Australians, Italian-Australians, and Peruvian-Australians).

Further, such policies generally focus on six major concerns:

(a) the multicultural nature of Australian society through its history.
(b) the Australian national identity of the students;
(c) the Australian ethnic identity of the students;
(d) the interaction of Australians from different ethnic groups;
(e) the status and role of English as the national language of Australia;
(f) the status and role of languages other than English.

Teachers are now moving from a monocultural towards a multicultural perspective on writing. The interrelationship between writing and multiculturalism is complex. In this chapter three significant aspects will be considered: the implications, first, of the philosophical shift towards multiculturalism for the content of children's writing; second, of the needs of second language learners; and third, of the needs of second script learners.

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1. Australia as a Multicultural Society

The philosophical shift to multiculturalism has two major consequences for the content of children's writing.

(a) Australians Live in a Multicultural Society

The first consequence is concerned with the type of society in which Australian children, irrespective of their ethnic background, live. Whether or not they are as fully aware of it as they should be, they 'live in a multicultural society'. The evidence that this is so is all around them, regardless of where in Australia they live: in people's names, in languages other than English, in places of worship linked to ethnic groups, in figures from Australia's past, in street and place names, in their neighbours, in radio and television, in the newspapers, in the variety of foods available, in their friends and their parents' friends, and so on. This diversity should, as a matter of course, find its place in children's writing.

More complicated experiences are related to the type and quality of the interaction between Australians. This interaction ranges from infrequent to frequent, irregular to regular, shallow to intense, hostile to friendly, and diffuse to specific. Embedded within the interaction are the attitudes and beliefs that individuals have about the people they are interacting with, and hence prejudices, ethnocentrism and stereotypes as well as tolerance, open-mindedness, and multicultural viewpoints are part of the interaction. Further, many children experience discrimination from their peers and themselves engage in discrimination. Such experiences, concerned with day to day affairs in a multicultural society, should find their way into children's writing.

(b) All Australians Are Ethnics

The second consequence is concerned with the fact that 'all Australians are ethnics'. The word *ethnic* (and its derivative *ethnicity*) is applied to the cultural heritage of a people. Ethnic groups consist of individuals who share a cultural heritage, and who interact on the basis of that cultural heritage, modified in its new environment. We have, for example, Scottish-Australians, Albanian-Australians, Cornish-Australians, Aboriginal-Australians, and Ukrainian-Australians. The activities of the ethnic group may be confined to cultural matters or, as is usually the case, may extend much wider, for example, into economic and political fields.

Ethnicity plays an important part in the lives of most children, because much of their primary enculturation or socialisation is related to the ethnic groups of which they are members. Thus many of their peers are of the same ethnic group, they visit relatives of the same ethnic group, and they learn in varying degrees the culture of the ethnic group. In some cases, where the ethnic group has a language other than English, the child members are becoming bilingual in the two languages, and many of their most significant experiences will have taken place through the mother tongue rather than English.

Writing about themselves in ethnic terms — themselves as 'ethnic', their activities within the ethnic group, their ethnic culture (folktales, traditions, prominent individuals, their language), their Australian ethnic history — in the mother tongue and/or English, gives expression to a major component of the identity of children, their ethnic identity. Such topics should be accepted and encouraged in children's writing.

An important subset of children who should not be ignored are those from English-speaking and non-English-speaking backgrounds who are immigrants, i.e. who were born overseas. They may be either native English speakers or native speakers of languages other than English. In all cases, their experience as immigrants — the migrating experience itself and settling into a new society — could well be expressed in their writing. Sympathetic treatment of such topics would help the immigrant children in their adjustment to their new lives as members both of an Australian ethnic group and of the Australian nation at large.

Overall then, the multicultural nature of Australian society, the ethnic affiliation of all Australian children, and the migrating and settling-in experiences of immigrant children can all be valued topics for children's writing, irrespective of the form. Narrative passages, poems, scrapbooks, plays, diaries, scripts, stories, biography, cartoons, autobiography, historical descriptions, and many others can all be avenues through which the children's experiences and interests find expression.

In a multicultural Australia the challenge of living in two worlds, an English-speaking Australian nation and an ethnic group, English-speaking or otherwise, within that nation, can be met by children, in part, through their teachers' acceptance that these two worlds are important and integral to the lives of the children they teach.

2. Second Language Learners

The language experiences of children in Australia from non-English-speaking backgrounds differ from those of children from English-speaking backgrounds along several dimensions. The most obvious of these is that children from non-English-speaking backgrounds will have significant experience of at least two languages. Teachers of such children need to understand the implications of the children's experiences in order to offer appropriate help with their writing, and of course with all facets of their language development.

Some of the factors which teachers need to consider in assisting the children with their writing are:

.. ages of the children (a) now, (b) on entry to school
.. time spent in an English-speaking environment
.. when, where and in which language they begin to learn writing
.. pre-school experiences
.. school experiences (if any) in other countries
.. level of development in language other than English
.. level of literacy skills in language other than English
.. level of English language development
.. level of English literacy skills
.. similarities/differences in writing conventions between English and other language(s)
.. value of writing in the culture of the children's place of origin
.. value of writing in the culture of their Australian ethnic group

The last two points are particularly important, because they affect parental, and hence child, attitudes to and expectations of the school system in respect of writing skills. Those parents, and in some cases children, who have had experience of the education system in their place of origin, will have impressions of the mode of approach to teaching writing there, the emphases in teaching, the evaluation procedures and the purposes for which writing is used. These impressions will not necessarily reflect *current* educational thinking in the place of origin since it may be some years since members of Australian ethnic groups have had direct experience of the education system in their place of origin. Thus, teachers need to be aware of parental attitudes and expectations in the context of their Australian ethnic group.

Matching Child and Task. Teachers must value the language capabilities each child brings to school, be they in English and/or other languages. Part of this valuing involves developing an understanding and awareness of each child's language environment at home, recognising and acknowledging language growth patterns, and having reasonable expectations of the writing abilities of children at various stages of English language development.

It is important to acknowledge the difficulties which may be encountered by children who are learning English as a second language in meeting the writing demands of subject areas across the curriculum. Teachers must beware of expecting these children to perform without support the same range of writing tasks as native English speakers.

Developing Oral Language. Development of the children's oral English fluency is essential. They must be encouraged to express their ideas freely. Oral discussion is also an important preparation for writing. For example, teachers can ask children to recount their personal stories in their mother tongue as well as in English.

Being Read to and Reading. Being read to and reading help familiarise children of all ages with the structures and functions of written language. These activities can take place both in the children's mother tongue and in English. Children can be involved in traditional rhymes, fables, fairy tales, legends of their own cultures and in those of other children.

Experience of Print. Children must experience the *range* of functions of print—stories, bulletin boards, display labels and so on. This is particularly important for children whose parents are illiterate, or whose experience of writing (in any language) is limited for cultural or linguistic reasons. They must also experience a variety of models to help them understand that written language is not just the preserve of teachers and classrooms.

Helping Children. Most strategies which help English-speaking children with their writing will also help children who are learning English as a second language, though teachers must be sensitive to the situations where children will need support. Second language learners may need help at ages and stages where English-speaking children may not. Strategies such as these are usually appropriate for all:

.. brainstorming topics
.. providing opening leads
.. providing frameworks or models
.. suggesting vocabulary
.. scribing for children who have difficulties
.. group/class composition sessions
.. allowing and encouraging collaboration between peers.

Additional strategies needed by some second language learners:
.. providing bilingual dictionaries
.. discussing in the mother tongue with peers/aides/teachers
.. writing in the mother tongue.

Controlled or Structured Writing. Some teachers consider that children learning English as a second language need a controlled program, as *part* of their writing experience, which exposes them to recurrent patterns in English grammar, provides practice relevant to their interests and experiences, and facilitates the choice of appropriate language.

It is a particularly demanding task for teachers planning such components in their programs to ensure that *the activities and tasks are presented imaginatively.* Visual aids, music, story, drama, etc., can all provide a stimulating context for controlled tasks.

It is also a demanding task for teachers to ensure that children are only given such tasks according to their needs. For example, if some children have not gained control over the way in which past experiences are described in English, then written stories requiring tense changes may be appropriate exercises.

Some strategies which may be used in controlled sentence, paragraph, or composition writing include: multiple choices in vocabulary; substitution exercises; matching beginnings and endings; completing sentences or stories; filling in gaps; sentence combining.

Handling of Errors. Children's errors in writing must always be handled sensitively, and this is particularly so in the case of second language learners. Their mistakes should be analysed from a second language learning perspective, with recognition that inappropriate language choices may be indicators of their level of English language development. Their attempts to communicate should be accepted in a positive way and, where necessary, unacceptable uses of language can be discussed in terms of 'appropriateness' rather than 'correctness'. This is particularly important for older second language learners; their writing may be inhibited by fear of making 'babyish' mistakes in English.

3. Second Script Learners

(a) Different Languages, Different Scripts

No two languages share identical writing conventions. Children from non-English-speaking backgrounds who have learnt to write in a language other than English have to learn the print conventions appropriate to English. Even pre-literate children will have had some

Writing Conventions in Some Other Languages

Language	Alphabet	Direction and Spacing	Examples of Punctuation Differences
Arabic	Arabic	From right to left. Word spaces as in Eng.	No capital letters. Question mark may be reversed or not: ؟ or ? Comma: ، on line Semicolon: ؛
Chinese	Non-aphabetic, uses characters (ideograms) which represent concepts.	Traditionally, top to bottom but now often left to right. No spaces needed between words.	No capital letters or semicolon. Full stop: 。 Punctuation marks are placed centrally in relation to lines or columns.
Greek	Cyrillic	As in English.	Semicolon is like a full stop but written above line. A question is marked by a symbol like the English semicolon.
Indonesian	Roman	As in English.	As in English.
Italian	Roman (but does not use J K W X Y)	As in English.	Capital letters are not used with names of months, days, proper adjectives, titles.
Laotian	Modified Sanskrit	From left to right. Spacing between words is optional.	No capital letters. Other punctuation marks optional.
Macedonian	Cyrillic	As in English.	Capitals not used with days of the week. Inverted commas are written on bottom line.
Croatian*	Roman (but does not use Q W X Y) New letters are Š, Ć, Č, Đ, Ž, DŽ	As in English.	Capitals not used with days of the week. Inverted commas are written on bottom line.
Serbian	Roman or Cyrillic	As in English.	Capitals not used with days of the week. Inverted commas are written on bottom line.
Maltese*	Roman (but does not use C Y) New letters are Ċ, Ġ, GĦ, Ħ, Ż	As in English.	As in English.
Spanish*	Roman New letters are Ñ, LL, RR	As in English.	Question marks and exclamation marks are inverted at beginning of a sentence as well as being written as in English at the end: ¿. . .? ¡ . . .!
Turkish	Roman (but does not use Q W X New letters are Ç, Ğ, İ, Ö, Ü, Ş	As in English.	Capitals not used with days of the week.
Vietnamese	Roman (but does not use F W X New letters are Ă, Â, Đ, Ê, Ô, Ơ, Ư	As in English.	As in English.

* In some alphabets certain combinations of letters are counted as single letters.

experience of other scripts and may confuse the two sets of conventions.

The language the children are familiar with may use the Roman alphabet, but not necessarily the 26 letters used in written English. Italian, for example, normally uses 21 letters (the other five, J, K, W, X and Y being used only for foreign words), while Turkish uses 29 (new letters being formed with diacritics such as ü and ğ).

Other languages use different alphabets such as the Cyrillic or the Arabic, while a few languages, e.g. Chinese, use ideograms to represent words or syllables.

Languages may also vary in the direction of writing, spacing and punctuation. The table on the opposite page lists the differences in alphabet, direction, spacing and punctuation between English and a number of the languages most commonly spoken in Australian schools by children from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Some children from non-English-speaking backgrounds may not have had much experience of the variety of writing implements and materials used by children in Australia and teachers should provide a 'scribbling' time to allow children to explore their uses. Older children practised in the different hand and arm movements needed for different scripts may need fluency practice appropriate to their maturity level.

(b) Sound-symbol Correspondence

The degree of regularity in the relationship between sound and symbol in alphabetic scripts varies from language to language. Children literate in a language other than English know the set of relationships for that language, and may expect similar symbols to be linked to similar sounds. For example, the letter 'c' in Turkish is usually pronounced [dʒ], like the 'j' in jam, while the letter 'j' is pronounced [ʒ], like the 's' in leisure. In non-Roman scripts some letters may look similar to English letters but represent different sounds. For example, the letter 'x' is Greek is pronounced [h], like the 'h' in hot, and the Greek 'v' is pronounced [n] like the 'n' in not.

Any confusion may affect children's spelling which may also be affected by the differences between the pronunciation of Australian-English and that of their mother tongue. For example, Spanish speakers may have difficulty discriminating between the vowel sounds [ɪ] and [i] of 'ship' and 'sheep', and might generalise from a known spelling of 'week' to a mis-spelling of 'seek' for 'sick'.

Care must be taken in the teaching of spelling to check children's aural perception and pronunciation. Spelling rules based on the relationship between Australian sounds and symbols may be quite confusing for second language learners.

Five

WRITING READING

A Remedial-Reading-through-Writing Program

by JAN TURBILL, Reading Consultant,
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> 'I can't read. I can't work out the words. The books I can read are boring,' admits ten year-old Ben. Then he adds, 'I can't write either. I can't spell the words I need, so my stories end up a mess.'

Ben is a so-called 'failed reader'. He reads well at a Grade 1 reading level but with anything more difficult, he stumbles. Ben sits in class day after day fully aware of his inadequacies. He can't read the various books, magazines and board exercises that are part of his everyday learning program, nor can he spell the words he needs. He can't write either; at least that is what he believes. A simple task of copying notes from the board is a difficult and boring exercise.

In any situation which involves reading, spelling or writing, Ben is faced with failure . . . yet the older he becomes, the more his learning program will demand reading and writing.

What hope is there for Ben?

New Approach to the 'Failed Reader'

There are many Bens in our schools. Teachers have tried various ways of helping them but still they creep from grade to grade *failing*. There are many possible causes of such failure—so many, indeed, that teachers, in basing remediation programs on what they believe to be the causes, usually experience only small success. Let us, then, try a different approach, beginning with a comparison of the observable reading behaviours of the 'failed reader' with those of the proficient reader. Ben and other 'failed readers'

.. do know many sounds and words
.. do turn what they read into 'nonsense' and accept it
.. do get very anxious when asked to read
.. do not attempt to predict words when reading
.. do not self-correct in reading
.. do not read for enjoyment
.. do not realise that reading is supposed to make sense
.. do not spell well and therefore do not write, but
.. do want to read and spell and write like their peers, and do try.

Ben needed to develop an understanding of the meaning and purpose of reading. He needed to see the relationship between reading, spelling and writing and to gain confidence in his ability to read and write. But how?

After discussion with his teacher and the school Principal, Ben was withdrawn from the situation in which he believed he was a 'failure', and placed in a special program in which he would monitor his own reading/writing progress. Here his whole reading program would revolve around a central activity: he would write his own reading material. This material would be about the things he knew, the things about which he wanted to read. It would therefore not be boring. He could and would read it. He would begin to find a purpose in reading . . . with these aims a program began, three other boys joined Ben, and a teachers' aide and parent aide agreed to help.

After only a ten week period Ben had moved from a Grade 1 reading level to a Grade 3 level. He was much more confident about his work both in the small group situation and the class situation. He realised he was still not at the same level as the other children in the class at reading, but he knew he had improved and believed that he could and would get there. He demonstrated in his reading that he was predicting words and self-correcting. The print on the page was now making sense. He was reading more, writing more and spelling better. He had come a long way in a short time.

Now after twenty weeks Ben has moved back into the classroom situation. The teachers' aide and parent aide still work with him and with the group, guiding them through the various reading/writing activities programmed by their teacher. His progress has been very rewarding to himself, to his parents and to his teacher.

This program has since been introduced successfully in several schools with children from Grades 3 to 8. We are carefully monitoring the progress.

Establishing the Program

1. Withdraw the child from the usual classroom reading/writing/spelling program and from related homework. The class timetable may need to be adjusted. Withdrawal time should be about one hour. A suitable place needs to be found in which to work. The withdrawal situation is essentially temporary and ends as soon as the child demonstrates enough confidence and progress in reading to cope with the normal classroom.

2. Identify someone to work with the child. If it is not possible for the class teacher to work intensively with the child (or group) an aide—either a teachers' aide or parent aide should be trained to work daily with the child. The teacher monitors the child's work and makes all decisions regarding progress.

3. Inform the parents of this new program that is being established to help the child in reading and writing. In particular, explain why the child is no longer getting homework. After the program has begun, invite the parents to visit the school to observe and work in the program with the child.

4. Explain to the child the requirements and expectations of the program. There needs to be voluntary acceptance of responsibility to write stories that will become the program 'readers'. At the same time the child will be made aware that while there are these expectations there will be no pressure.

The Program

(The child is referred to as 'he' because this was a group of boys.)

Remember: always to be positive;
the so-called 'failed reader' is fragile;
leave the pencil or pen in the child's hand.

1. Time for writing. One of the keys to this program is providing time daily for the child to practise writing and reading in a secure, supportive environment. The child can choose to write, to read or to talk to the aide about his work. One piece of writing may take several days to complete. The aide guides the child by asking questions, by actively listening, and by giving assistance when requested. The aide also takes time each day to read aloud so that the child hears the language patterns of good literature.

2. Choice of topic. The child chooses his own topic. This is crucial. All children are 'authorities' in some area and only when given the opportunity to write what they know or care about does the writing become their own. They want to inform the reader of their experiences and expertise. Choosing a topic may be difficult at first but the child will soon find something to write about after discussion with the aide. To assist topic-finding, the child should keep a continually growing list of possible topics in the front of his folder, the folder in which all writing pieces are kept.

3. Invented spelling. The child is encouraged to 'invent' confidently any spellings he is in doubt about; that is, to write as best he can the words he needs. He can be told to attempt to write 'part of the word' or 'all the sounds and letters you can hear or see in the word'. The aim is to give control of the story to the child; to allow the language to flow so that it says what the child wants it to say.

The aide accepts all attempts and does not 'correct' words in front of the child. (It may be necessary to write the conventional spellings on the original so the typist can read them.) If, for instance, the child asks for the spelling of 'carrot', he can be encouraged to write part of it, or as much of it as he can. But if he asks, 'Are there two *r's* in carrot?', he can be given the answer.

A good idea is to give him a little book for 'Spelling Guesses'. When he asks how to spell a word, encourage him to write it into this book in as many ways as he thinks it might be written. After he has written several 'guesses', suggest that he choose the one he thinks is closest. He should be given help whenever requested.

4. 'First writing' — the draft. The 'first writing' piece belongs to the child. It is his draft, and it becomes non-threatening if he is told that it can be regarded as a practice piece. He can choose to write on paper, in a book or whatever, using the writing implement he prefers. He needs to be encouraged and often shown how to cross out words or whole parts not wanted, how to insert words or pieces which help to clarify the story, and other useful editing strategies. The only rules with the first draft are that the child must himself be able to read his story and that it says what he wants it to say; in short, he has to be able to make it clear to someone else.

The role of the aide at this stage is to help the child identify parts of the piece that are confusing and unclear to another reader. This obliges the aide to question the child further on the topic while at the same time pointing out why the words on the page are unclear. For example, 'I can't know that the reason you fell off your bike was that the chain broke, if your writing doesn't say so'. The child needs to be continually reminded that the reader will only be informed if the words on the page tell what happened.

Some children prefer to write the whole story before they want to discuss it with someone and make any changes. Others will stop and edit after each sentence or paragraph. Whichever situation applies, the aide only responds to the story-line when the child seeks a response.

Discussions about spellings will occur throughout writing. Again the aide responds only at the child's request.

5. Publication of the story. The final step for the child is the making of a book that he can and will read. This is 'publishing'. It may be carefully written out by the child or it may be typed from his final draft, in conventional spelling and punctuation.

Here are some points to remember before publishing:

- Not everything the child writes has to be published. But if the child wants a piece published he must first make sure the story is set down in such a way that the reader gets the intended message.
- The child should then check the story for any spellings or punctuation he can change or insert in a bid to achieve the conventional form. The aide may guide the child by pointing out a word that has been spelt several ways in the same story, e.g. 'truk', 'truke'. If the child indicates that he knows 'ck' by spelling 'back' in his piece, this can be pointed out to him: 'You know there is *ck* in *back*, because you wrote it here. Look at *truk* again. What should it have in it?' If the child answers 'I don't know', leave it, but if he says 'c', ask him to write it in and then look through the piece and change any other words that need 'ck'. A discussion about one spelling point in each piece is enough—and remember that the child changes his own work.
- If the child demonstrates that he can use full-stops, capital letters and other punctuation conventions, it is at this last stage that he should be encouraged to go through his piece and ensure that they have been properly inserted. If he cannot do this yet, it can be done for him by the typist.
- The child may be able to indicate how much of the piece should go on each page. For example, 'Page 1 should end here because this much goes with the first picture.' If he is not yet up to this, the aide or typist can do it for him. This step is really the beginning of paragraphing.
- The piece should be typed, with the amount per page signified by the child, in conventional spelling and punctuation. There should be a cover page which will include the heading, the author's name and date of publication. To preserve the book, staple it between two pieces of cardboard. Quarto or half foolscap is the suggested page size.
- As soon as the story has been typed it is given to the child, who reads and then illustrates it. After the published book has been read to and otherwise shared with classmates, it is placed in the class library as the latest addition to a stock of child-authored reading matter.

6. The conference between the aide and child. The 'conference' plays an integral role in the program. What does the aide do in the conference?

- Talks with the child about choice of topics, the opening or 'lead', endings, etc.
- Helps the child 'tease out' the story so it reads as the child wants.
- Teaches the conventions of writing in the context of the child's writing.
- Serves as the initial reader of the child's writing. (Other children will soon adopt this role—termed 'peer conferencing', which is a very effective teaching strategy.)

Peer Conference. When the opportunity arises for children to work in small groups, peer conferencing should be encouraged. The children help each other identify parts of the story that are unclear. Peers make a critical but supportive audience and the child tends to accept a peer's suggestions and criticisms without feeling threatened. Peer conferencing about topic choice, spelling and other writing conventions is also very beneficial.

7. Reading. As the reading resources begin to build up, the child needs to be encouraged to read his own and other published books to the aide each day. Other 'outside' reading material should also be available. This may include books from the library, books from home, the school magazine and any book the child wants to read. The aide should spend 5-10 minutes daily reading from this selection to each child. This gives a child the opportunity to hear the language structures of good literature which he may in turn use in his own writing, and to discuss stories other authors have written.

If the child stumbles over a word, encourage him to guess it from the meaning to the story, or even tell him, rather than have him spend too much time trying to work it out.

8. Evaluation. All drafts should be dated and kept in the child's folder. They become an extremely useful, progressive record for the teacher of what the child is learning, indicating not only the progress in writing but also in spelling and reading. This is a useful record for the child and parents alike. This program, 'Writing Reading', has been used successfully as a remedial reading approach with small groups and in the one-to-one situation. However, it need not be regarded only as a remedial reading program; in fact, many teachers are now using it on a whole class basis with equal success. In this article it has been limited to our topic, the 'failed-reader'.

All children presently involved in the program have shown remarkable progress in reading, writing, spelling and overall attitude to learning. When children who have been failing in these areas for many years now rush into lessons eager to get their latest book to read and illustrate, when they groan at the bell that signifies the end of the session, and when they ask if they can finish their writing at home, then something significant is happening. As indeed it is! They are 'writing reading' and this is their pathway to success in both reading and writing.

Six

EVALUATING LANGUAGE

Evaluating School Language: Key Questions

by GRAHAM LITTLE
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A trial of a new method of curriculum evaluation through language has recently been completed in Tasmania. The method concentrates on the everyday language of classrooms instead of relying on dubious external tests. It analyses this language to reveal the kinds of meaning involved in it, and relates component 'skills' to meaning and situation, instead of treating them in isolation. The analysts and evaluators are the classroom teachers themselves, who testify that they find this evaluation to be itself a significant learning experience. The results for each classroom remain confidential to the participants, but the pooled results are available to the education system as a means of testing the effects of policy against what actually happens in schools.

The project arose out of my report on 'Language Development: School and Adult Models' to the Launceston Conference on Language Development: Theory into Practice, published by the Launceston Teachers' Centre, 1981. The report outlined an analysis of some 3,000 examples of school and adult language, and led to an invitation by the Tasmanian Primary Language Committee to work with teachers in developing the analysis as a method of curriculum evaluation.

The Sample of Language

Ten schools for the Pilot Study were selected at random from the Southern Region. The teachers of 7 and 10 year olds in the ten schools were asked if they would like to join the project. All agreed, and for two weeks they sampled language in use in English and other subjects in their own classrooms, each concentrating on three children: one 'high flyer', one 'average', and one 'battler'; not to make invidious comparisons, but to sample a fair range of language.

The data to be analysed comprised:

Student Listening:	tapes of teacher exposition.
Student Speaking:	tapes of the children working in small groups.
Student Reading:	photocopies of what students were reading.
Student Writing:	sustained, original writing rather than jottings, notes or copied material.

This large collection of materials was brought to a two-day workshop in which pairs of teachers, each assisted by a member of the Committee, analysed their own material. The collection was reduced to a total of 200 examples of language up to about 50 words each, deemed by each group to be representative of the full collection.

As the results made sense, and were not dissimilar to results for other education systems, it was accepted that this method led to a fair sampling of normal classroom language.

Analysis

Each example of language was annotated for subject and age, and whether it was listening, speaking, reading or writing. Each was analysed at three levels:

A. *Meaning*—the kinds of thought and feeling expressed.

B. *Wording*—the selection and arrangement of words to serve the kind of meaning expressed.

C. *Word-Processing*—the physical act of listening, speaking, reading or writing (in this case, confined to the skills of writing).

A. Meaning

Each item was analysed in terms of the kind of meaning involved. Thought was analysed in terms of content and abstraction, and feeling in terms of human relationships and purpose of communication. The following are the major trends in results.

1. Content. What was the language about? The key item was the proportion of nouns referring to the material world, in contrast to those referring to the human world. Result, 2:1 (most of the human reference was people's names). Reference to matter exceeded the references to the mind or society by 6:1.

2. Audience. What sorts of human relationship were involved? The main issue was the proportion of communications of an impersonal (academic, public) nature to communications of a more intimate kind (an audience of self, or intimates). Result, 2:1.

3. Purpose. Why was the communication undertaken? (Why, that is, in the sense of immediate communicative intention?) The essential issue was the proportion of communications predominantly concerned with emotionally-neutral factual information, in contrast to communications more concerned with feeling: self-expression, human relationships, or the use of imagination. Result, 2:1.

Thus two thirds of the communications were found to deal objectively with material facts, and one third to deal with more specifically human concerns. For the factual two-thirds, a further aspect of meaning was analysed:

4. Abstraction. How generalised was the information?

a. *Concrete:* dealing with the questions What is happening? or What happened? 51%.

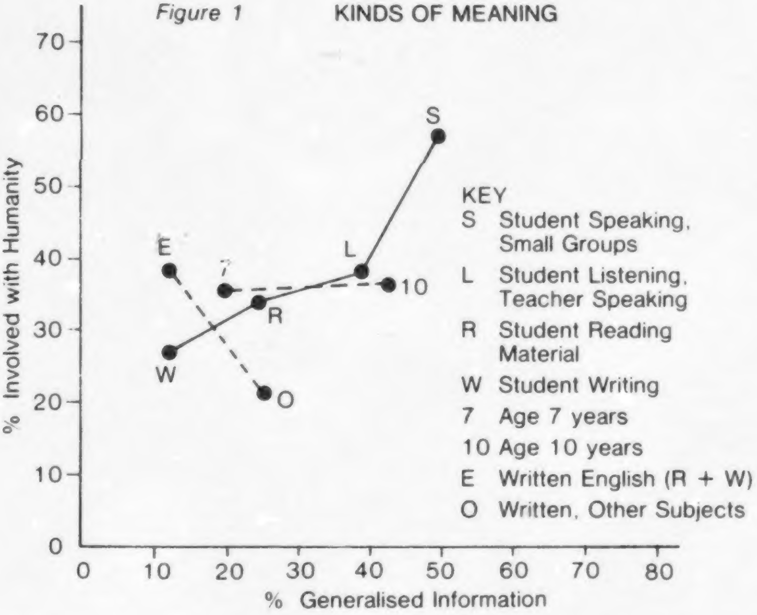
b. *Generalised:* dealing with What happened? 47%.

c. *Abstract:* dealing with Why? 2%.

In summary, we may say that a third of the language comprises impersonal discourse about concrete, material facts. Another third is generalisation in the same vein. The final third is more 'humanistic': human in content, specific in audience, and with expressive, interactional or imaginative purposes.

Figure 1 sums up the variations in the kinds of meaning dealt with by age and subject, and whether the language consists of student listening, speaking, reading or writing. As would be expected, English is more humanistic than other subjects (about 20% more so), and other subjects are more given to impersonal generalisations about matters of fact (about 15% more so). As would also be expected, there is increased abstraction with age (about 20%). But the major difference is made to meaning by whether the students are listening, speaking, reading or writing.

Figure 1 KINDS OF MEANING



Student speech in small groups shows evenly-balanced concern with humanity and material fact, and with concrete facts and generalisations.

Student listening (to teacher exposition) is less humanistic and generalised (about 33% each). Notably, it falls near the mean for the other kinds of communication, as it does in formal features analysed below. It appears that teachers judge their speech well for their purpose, setting the general tone and mediating between the extremes of kinds of language met in the curriculum.

Student reading material is some 30% humanistic and 20% generalised.

Student writing is only some 25% humanistic and 10% generalised.

Interpretation. The data on meaning has two kinds of importance. It is of interest in itself as a summary of the kinds of thought and feeling evident in a fair sample of school language. It also gives a basis in terms of which the data on 'skills' can be interpreted.

The workshop leadership did not see its function as imposing any particular interpretation on the participants. The following is a summary of their reflections. We might well expect the language of the public schools to be largely public and informational, and so it is. There is no evidence that, as 'progressives' might claim and 'traditionalists' might fear, the language of the schools is excessively 'subjective'. The main concern is undoubtedly factual information about the material world. Nobody would dispute that this is an important aim of schooling.

If there are reservations, they are about whether school language is too exclusively of this 'objective' character. For instance, is it desirable that references to the material world outnumber references to personality and society by 6:1? That only 1% of language concentrates on *why* things are as they are? That only 1% is non-literal (poetic)? That only 7% is expressive of the self? That only 8% of writing is addressed to any but a public/academic audience? If language competence is ability to deal with a wide variety of subjects, audiences and purposes, the range of school language experience would seem to be rather too restricted for rounded development.

That children can deal with the relatively neglected areas of language experience is reassuringly shown by the data from the discussion in small groups, discussion which is more balanced in its concern with material facts and their human significance; and with concrete information and generalisations about it. But the reading material, and especially the writing tasks, do not much reinforce this balance.

One way of describing the situation is to say that the schools ask certain kinds of questions rather than others. They frequently ask:

What is happening? What happened? — Concrete information
What happens? — Generalised information

But they do not frequently ask:
Why? — Abstract information
What if . . .? — Use of imagination
So what? — Human and social significance.

To this extent, they might not be treating the subject matter fully, or developing language competence in relation to the second set of issues.

The following piece of writing by a 10 year old in social studies is very typical of the factual material:

> *North East Coast Lands*
> 1. *The capital city of Queensland is Brisbane, the aboriginal is humpy Bong.*
> 2. *The N.E. is not as rocky as the s.e.*
> 3. *It has two hundred and seven days hot.*

The following by a 7 year old is untypical in showing both greater involvement with human life, and greater abstraction of thought:

> In castals there were not only soldiers but there was knights. Knights were people dressed in amoor. If you want to be a knight you have to start training when you are seven years old. All knights had to swear that they would serve god. No good knight would ever forget those promises . . .

In terms of meaning, the younger child's work is far in advance of the older child's. There are still facts, but there is more humanity, and more intellect. Teachers suggested that balance would be improved if only the second set of issues were made more prominent, as they are in the second extract, without necessarily changing the basic subject matter or the first set of questions. Adding the second set of questions could help deepen thought, humanise knowledge and advance language competence, by building upon what is already achieved rather than trying to replace it.

Most participants stated that the analysis led to specific decisions to revise the range of stimulus material and questions used in their classrooms. As each classroom was different, the specifics were different, but the general desire for better balance was shared.

In any case, knowledge of the range of meanings exchanged was seen as shedding light on the nature of the skills in evidence.

B. Wording

Wording is the selection and arrangement of words to serve meaning—the 'skills', if one likes to call them such, of using vocabulary, syntax and paragraph structures. Such skills can only be understood in terms of the intended meaning.

For instance, it is not a Good Thing always to use long or short words or sentences. What is good—that is, appropriate—depends on the situation. It is educated adult practice to write more formally than one speaks. It is also educated adult practice to signal higher abstraction by:

a. Longer words (more syllables per word, bringing in classically-based technical vocabulary).
b. More abstract nouns (e.g. concrete, *Hitler*; general, *dictators*; abstract, *dictatorship*).
c. More timeless verbs (e.g. always *is,* rather than *is at* this moment, or *was* once).
d. Longer sentences (e.g. long sentences in explanation; short ones in simple reporting).
e. Logical rather than chronological sentence sequencing or paragraph structure (e.g. chronological in an anecdote; logical in an explanation).

The findings for wording are that within the range of meanings dealt with in school language, wording changes with changes of meaning along the lines of the adult model. Table 1 sums up the results for wording, keeping in mind that Other Subjects are more 'abstract' than

Table 1 **Wording**

Language	Mean No. of Syllables per Word	% Higher Abstraction of Noun	% Timeless Verbs	% Logical Sequence	Mean Words per 'sentence'
Written English	1.25	9	10	23	8.20
Written Other Subjects	1.30	28	51	83	8.60
Subjects Spoken	1.23	67	15	88	8.15

English, and speech is more 'abstract' than either, in the school setting. The term 'sentences' in Table 1 needs explanation. For this purpose, the term is redefined so that a new statement beginning with 'and' is counted as a new 'sentence'. This distinguishes a compound sentence as a string of and-clauses like 'I got up/and got dressed/and went out' (3 'sentences' of three words each) from a more truly complex statement of the same total length, e.g. 'When I saw what I had done, I apologised'. There are still three clauses, but they are smoothly interwoven, not just added together with 'ands'.

The entries in Table 1 show that the children follow the educated adult model in using simpler language in speech than in writing. The exceptions are the use of more abstract nouns and more logical sentence sequencing, which are necessary to carry the higher abstraction evident in speech.

In writing, the children show with rising abstraction (moving from English to other subjects) that they follow the formal adult model in using more complex language of the other kinds, as well: longer words, more timeless verbs, longer sentences and more logical sentence sequences.

We have seen that schools concentrate on some kinds of meaning rather than others. Within this range, they also grade language for complexity of wording. Within both sets of restrictions, reading material and the teachers' speech present models of adult changes of form with changes of functions; and the children speak and write in accord with the models they are presented. Thus children systematically approximate the adult model more and more closely as they move through the years of schooling. For example, the average maximum 'sentence' length which is sustained in student listening, speaking, reading or writing tends to be equal to or less than the students' age in years. (Great discovery?) The average age of these students is about 8½ years, and the longest average 'sentence' length in sustained discourse is 8.6 words in reading and writing in subjects other than English. At age 17, this tends towards 17 words for abstract material, and 10 words for narrative types of discourse.

In such ways, the children quite evidently make systematic progression in vocabulary, syntax and sentence-sequencing, along adult lines, towards the adult model. The teachers were not displeased with these results.

If there are problems in wording, they are not so much problems confined to wording as such, as problems arising from restrictions of meaning. For instance, technical vocabulary develops well, but there is so little experience of vocabulary for human life, that it cannot be rationally expected that children are so familiar with it. Thus we might well expect children to be familiar with the physical term 'diameter'; but the moral 'dilemma' is much less likely to have been met. This is because of the strongly materialistic bias of content in school language. As another example, we might say that the sentence types and sentence sequences for narrative and generalising are well established, but those for sustained argument are so little met that it would be extremely optimistic to suppose that competence in these would be as well developed.

If it is thought that a balance needs to be redressed here, it would not be a matter of teaching certain vocabulary items or types of sentence or paragraph in isolation, but of making more of the questions *Why? What if . . .?* and *So what?* as lessons went along.

There would be no harm in having less of *The capital city of Queensland is Brisbane* and more of this sort of exchange arising in 7 year-olds' group work with magnets:

— *Will the things connect?*
— *Staples connect.*
— *The magnetic things connect.*
— *No, the cents don't work. I wonder why?*
— *Because they're not magnetic.*

C. Word Processing

In this Pilot Survey, we concentrated on three main surface skills of writing: handwriting, spelling and punctuation. In some related studies, we have studied some skills of reading, by 'cloze' technique, blanking out words and seing what replacements students make. The trend in findings so far is that, generally, teachers present reading materials that are challenging to students but within the grasp of their comprehension, especially with a little help from the teacher.

Results for Writing Skills:

1. Virtually 100% of the words written by children are legible.
2. 94% of words are correctly spelt at age 7, and 98.5% at age 10.
3. The full stop is correctly used 86% of the time at age 7, and 88% at age 10.

These skills are obviously being well catered for. Other studies show that 100% legibility and 98% correct spelling are general. Use of the full stop is virtually 100% correct at about age 16. If there are difficulties, they arise from restrictions of the kinds of content and functions of language experienced, such as unfamiliarity with certain areas of the English vocabulary, or sentence construction for the more abstract kinds of thinking, or ways of wording things for new audiences such as employers.

Conclusions

It has been an unfortunate tradition of mass education since its foundation to look at surface skills in isolation from meaning. But it simply does not make sense to say that someone can read and write, unless we also say *what* the person can read and write.

By relating skills to the kinds of meaning exchanged in the everyday language of schools we gain a picture rather different from that usually given. It seems evident that what the schools do, they do well. The skills of vocabulary, grammar, paragraphing, handwriting, spelling and punctuation are well catered for. They develop in systematic fashion towards the educated adult model as the children move through the years of schooling.

The evidence about this development of skills is in the schools, waiting to be analysed and communicated, and it needs no mystique of 'standardised' testing to establish the fact. I would like to start a campaign to encourage teachers to report on the development of skills in this positive, realistic manner. I believe that, over time, it would do a lot of good.

Any problems are not so much problems of the skills as such, but of the somewhat limited range of content, purposes and audiences in terms of which they are developed. Improvement would not mean abandoning the world of public information about concrete fact that so dominates school language. It would mean building upon it by more follow up of questions such as *Why? What if . . .?* and *So what?* Such an adjustment would humanise knowledge and lead to more rounded language competence.

At least these are the reflections to which this kind of curriculum analysis of meaning, wording and word processing gives rise. From responses so far, it would seem to have a useful function in describing what happens in schools, indicating areas where improvement might be sought, and providing a method of monitoring whether planned improvements are having effects.

N.B. I would like to thank the Tasmanian Education Department and the participating teachers, together with Canberra College of Advanced Education, for the opportunity to conduct this study. — G.L.

PART VII

Tips for Writers

A glossary on composing, usage, grammar and style

Quintilian, writing in ancient Rome, went so far as to advise: 'Seize firmly the matter; the words will follow.'

Certainly that is the right order — but the words do not always follow so obligingly. Their choice and arrangement present innumerable small problems and a few large ones. This is why writers are avid gatherers of tips about the craft. Robert Frost, questioned by a gushing admirer who felt sure he 'wouldn't use technical tricks' when writing his 'beautiful poems', exclaimed, 'I revel in 'em!'

Such 'tips' and 'tricks', however, can seem dull to children if we adults speak weightily of them as 'technicalities', 'formalities', 'mechanics', 'conventions', 'grammar', or 'standard usage'.

I prefer to think that the following Glossary is simply a collection of tips for teachers of writing, tips they can selectively pass on to their students as problems arise. It draws attention at many points to the existence of more language choices and flexibilities than most teachers are likely to be aware of.

This could be called a style approach to the technical side of writing, in contrast to the old 'correctness tradition' which held that there was only right or wrong, black or white, one way of talking and writing in all situations, regardless of audience, subject or occasion.

a or an? In choosing which of these to use in writing, be guided by what you normally *say*. In general, *a* is used before consonants (except silent *h: an heir, an honour),* and *an* before vowels (except those with a *y* or *w* sound: *a union, a once-famous name).* But some uses of *an* before *h* are in dispute, e.g. before *habitual, hallucination, heroic, historical, hotel, hypothesis, hysterical;* if you speak these words with less than the full sound of the *h* in *hope,* you will probably prefer to use *an* in front of them. Either *a* or *an* is acceptable.

Notes on the Glossary; and Abbreviations

(1) *AGPS Style Manual:* This is the *Style Manual: for Authors, Editors and Printers of Australian Government Publications,* published by the Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

(2) *MEU:* This is *Modern English Usage* by H. W. Fowler (Oxford). The notions of usage abroad in the Australian community have come mainly from old classroom correctness prescriptions and from Fowler's book which has enjoyed scriptural authority in educational circles for half a century. Neither Fowler nor other compilers of popular usage texts worked from statistical surveys of actual usage. He based his views on data collected rather haphazardly for the Oxford English Dictionary — certainly not a usage survey. Moreover he often disagreed with the data and then simply expressed his own opinions. His great contemporary, Otto Jespersen, termed him 'an instinctive grammatical moraliser'. Some of his views still stand and are reflected in this Glossary; others have been left behind by either usage itself or recent scholarly studies of usage, grammar and rhetoric.

(3) These 'Tips' are a 1981 revision of items researched by the author in the early seventies for the 'Guide to Usage and Style' which he contributed to *Good Australian English,* edited by G. W. Turner (Reed 1972).

abbreviation or contraction? The difference is important. An abbreviation omits letters including the last; a contraction also omits letters but retains the last. Commonly a full-stop is used after an abbreviation but not after a contraction.

abbreviations:	col.	Tas.	pic.	Nov.	p.	ed.	Mon.
contractions:	Ave	Mr	Pty	parlt	Rd	Ltd	govt

Some newspapers are now also omitting the stop after abbreviations, esp. after familiar caps, e.g. NSW ACTU.

active or passive? The active voice, which makes the doer the subject of the sentence, is the more common order in English sentences, and is usually to be preferred as the briefer, more direct form . . .

active: A rocket struck the bow of the ship.
passive: The bow of the ship was struck by a rocket.
But passives are sometimes useful or necessary, e.g.
'Joe has been choked by fumes.' (emphasises person-acted-on)
'Heat was applied to the mixture.' (a common form in science)
'New houses are being built.' (the doer is unimportant)

ad Like *flu, taxi* or *exam, ad* has become a word in its own right, not an abbreviation, and so does not need a full-stop. At the more formal levels of writing it usually yields to *advertisement.* See also SIMPLER WORDS.

affect or effect? They are often confused. *Affect,* in most of its uses, is a verb meaning 'influence' (also 'pretend'), e.g. 'Music affects me in strange ways'. The chief use of *effect* is as a noun meaning 'result', e.g. 'Music has a strange effect on me'. Less commonly, *effect* is used as a verb meaning 'bring about' or 'cause', e.g. 'The vet has effected a complete cure'.

agreement in number Without going into the numerous rules on agreement that are given in grammar books, here are ten examples which show the common problems in making the verb agree with its singular or plural subject (the subject is underlined and the verb is in italics):
The child *is* ready. Her parents *are* waiting.
The case of oranges *is* bad. The trucks of sand *are* arriving.
Fifty years *is* a short time historically. (A period.)
Thirteen dollars *is* not much. (An amount.)
'Seven Little Australians' *is* a classic. (A book.)
Jack, not Jill, *is* to blame.
Bob and Bill *are* due soon. Bob or Bill *is coming* (one or other).
Each of us *is* at fault. *(Each, every, either, neither,* are singulars.)
Either Don or Harry *is* responsible.
The crowd *is* a record. The crowd *are* fighting among themselves.

ain't The schools have campaigned so bitterly against this contraction that no one dare use it in any context, except facetiously. Fair enough to condemn *ain't* as an unjustified substitute for *isn't, aren't, hasn't, haven't,* but the campaign insensitively killed innocent *ain't I?,* a justifiable contraction of *am not I?* The ways of usage can be strange! Sooner than risk (ignorant) censure by saying *ain't I?,* people everywhere now use the illogical *aren't I?* (are not I?).

all right or alright The texts which for so long have said, '*All right* is right, but *alright* is all wrong', have, however, failed to make *alright* a non-word. For instance it appears widely in advertising. It makes more sense than *all right* in exclamations like 'That's alright!' And most people go on nonchalantly using it, probably because it is a similar formation to *almost, already, although, altogether, always.* In situations like this, teachers need an historical approach: 'Use of *alright* is plainly increasing, but many people have been taught that it is wrong and that *all right* is correct. In fact, *alright* is neither morally nor linguistically wrong. Usage seems likely to make it wholly respectable in a decade or so. Use whichever you please; but be aware that some people will criticise you if you use *alright.*'

a lot Write this as two words, never as one. Some authorities feel it is a highly colloquial usage which should be avoided in favour of alternatives such as *many* and *much*, except in very informal writing; but that is surely going too far.

although or though? They are equally acceptable and are interchangeable.

ambiguity Only constant vigilance can save a writer from occasional lapses into ambiguity. Children are easily aroused to the problem when examples are presented:
Police Help Assault Victim. (headline)
He told his father he had failed.
Flying planes can be dangerous.
I shall lose no time reading your story.
Leaping into the saddle the horse galloped off.
We saw a kangaroo out driving today.
Don't kill your wife with work — let electricity do it.
We were sorry to hear of your narrow escape from death.

among or amongst? *Among* is the common form. Some people feel *amongst* is old-fashioned; but it is often found before words beginning with a vowel and as a sentence opener — it is by no means dead. So use whichever sounds agreeable.

among or between? An old rule says, 'Use *between* of two things, *among* of three or more', but Sir Ernest Gowers calls this 'superstition'. To insist on the rule is unhelpful: both words are used without confusion by speakers and writers, often in contradiction of the rule, e.g. ' . . . my mind will, I fear, always waver between dislike, exasperation, boredom, and admiration' (T.S. Eliot).

and/but as sentence-openers Still heard in some schools is the dogma, 'You must not start a sentence with *and* or *but*'. But English writers have been using these simple connectives in that way for a thousand years and continue to do so. Of course their use should not be overdone.

apostrophes Too much fuss is made of the 'difficulty' of getting apostrophes right in the possessive forms of nouns (and some indefinite pronouns). This simple 3-step rule works for both singulars and plurals:
(1) write the name of the owner/owners
(2) then add an apostrophe
(3) only add an *s* if it sounds right.
Fifteen minutes practice with this rule should clinch the matter for evermore — and clarify such allegedly difficult instances as, *one sheep's tail, two sheep's tails; a man's voice, two men's voices; John Keats's poems* or *John Keats' poems.* In the last instance, both forms are correct because we may say (and therefore write) them either way.

around or round? Efforts to keep a clear distinction between *around* and *round* have not succeeded. The words are increasingly used interchangeably, even in formal writing.

as to This phrase can be useful at the beginning of a sentence: '*As to* the moral problem, my opinion . . .' But it usually sounds stilted within a sentence and can be omitted without loss or can give way to *on* or *about:* 'My opinion *on* the moral problem . . .' The not uncommon phrase, *as to whether,* can usually be cut with profit to *whether.*

basics There is no agreed meaning of this overused term. Anyone who speaks of 'back to basics' or the 'basics of education' (or of language or literacy or writing) should be asked at once to state what he or she means. Two meanings commonly implied by advocates of 'back to basics' are: (1) the conventions of written English, and (2) the '3Rs', i.e. elementary reading, writing and mathematics.

(1) The 'conventions' of writing are its alphabet, spelling, punctuation, and grammatical correctness. But these are no more than the surface or technical features of writing; by themselves they do not enable anyone to write clearly and persuasively. So an adequate definition of the basics of learning to write must go well beyond the 'conventions' — to include, at least, regular practice in writing on a range of subjects for a range of responsive readers, with a good deal of time given to writing on self-chosen topics, which permit original thinking, i.e. topics which require decision-making and clear, persuasive expression of meaning. In short, the basics of learning to write demand much more than exercises on the correct use of 'conventions'.

(2) The '3Rs' is a woefully trivial conception of 'basic education', as is shown by contrasting it with a single paragraph from the 'Essentials of Education' statement of U.S. educators:

> *The interdependence of skills and content is the central concept of the essentials of education. Skills and abilities do not grow in isolation from content.* In all subjects, students develop skills in using language and other symbol systems; they develop the ability to reason; they undergo experiences that lead to emotional and social maturity. Students master these skills and abilities through observing, listening, reading, talking, and writing *about* science, mathematics, history and the social sciences, the arts and other aspects of our intellectual, social, and cultural heritage. As they learn about their world and its heritage they necessarily deepen their skills in language and reasoning and acquire the basis for emotional, aesthetic, and social growth. They also become aware of the world around them and develop an understanding and appreciation of the interdependence of the many facets of that world. [*For the full statement, see P.E.T.A.'s* 101 QUESTIONS PRIMARY TEACHERS ASK, p. 22.]

between or among? See AMONG OR BETWEEN?

between you and I? This phrase is as common in spoken English in Australia as it is in England and the United States. While some usage authorities are disposed to accept it in speech, there is general agreement that *'between you and me'* should be used in writing.

bi- This prefix means *two,* e.g. *bicentenary* refers to a two-hundredth anniversary. But carelessness has confused some uses of the prefix so that it is safer to say 'every two weeks' or 'fortnightly' rather than *biweekly,* 'every two months' than *bimonthly,* 'every two years' than *biennially.*

Bible When this word refers to the Christian Scriptures, convention accords it special status: it need not be enclosed in inverted commas nor italicised but can simply be written with a capital.

brackets See PARENTHETICAL DEVICES.

but at end of sentence Surely teachers must unite against it! For example, in 'I won't do it but', *but* is either redundant or an unwarranted substitute for *though* or *however.*

but or however? The *AGPS Style Manual* in discussing sentence linkage says that *but* is nearly always preferable to *however,* having more force and point and being less likely to be misused. The opinion is valuable though perhaps too strong, for *however* can be a valuable style resource in some prose, e.g. exposition. See also AND/BUT; SIMPLER WORDS.

can or may (could or might)? Nearly all authorities concede that *can* and *may* are now interchangeable as expressions of permission in speech and informal writing (*'Can/may* he have another chance?'); some, though perhaps not a majority, would allow it in any writing. Similar remarks apply to the past tense forms, *could/might*.

(N.B. The father who corrects his son's '*Can* I?' to '*May* I?' is likely then to say to his wife, 'I told him he *could*, if he asked properly' — and would be hurt if his wife then corrected his *could* to *might*. Usage, not a 'correctness rule', has determined the father's practice as well as the son's.)

can't hardly/couldn't hardly? Use *can hardly/could hardly*.

centre around or on? Logic points to *centre on*, though *centre around* is commonly heard, perhaps because attention is not on the centre but on what is clustered around it.

circumstances, in or under? The old rule which condemned *under the circumstances* has few defenders today. *Under* . . . is today as acceptable as *in* . . .

clichés By a common definition, clichés are overused phrases or short sentences that have become boringly familiar. Careful writers avoid them. (Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of Clichés* lists a few thousand examples.) Here are some examples:

beat a hasty retreat
blissful ignorance
burning issue
cool as a cucumber
ding-dong struggle
foregone conclusion
gay abandon
given the green light
iron out the difficulty
leave no stone unturned
more the worse for wear
pinpoint the cause

Sir Ernest Gowers in his *Complete Plain Words* says that certain overused words, such as *develop, involve, overall*, also deserve to be called clichés when more exact words might have been used: 'Clichés are notorious enemies of the precise word.' In good writing a conscious effort should be made to weed out clichés, though in the give-and-take of conversation we can afford to be less discriminating. Yet even the best writers do not dispense entirely with familiar phrases. Some of these phrases, carefully selected and used deliberately, serve as an extension of vocabulary, expressing succinctly what might otherwise take more words and sound less effective. 'It depends', says Gowers, 'on whether they are used unthinkingly as reach-me-downs, or are deliberately chosen as the best means of saying what the writer wants to say.'

colloquial In an old but persistent meaning, 'colloquial' is vulgar, slangy speech, but a better informed meaning is spreading: 'Characteristic of or appropriate to the spoken language or to writing that seeks its effect; informal in diction or style of expression' *(American Heritage Dictionary)*. A moderate use of colloquial in nearly all writing makes for liveliness and readability. It can be found even in the writing on serious and quite technical subjects of authorities as eminent as Bertrand Russell, J.K. Galbraith or Manning Clark. The distinguished prose stylist William Hazlitt was advocating as much in the early 19th century when he said, 'I plead guilty to the determined use of acknowledged idioms and common elliptical expressions.' He knew that such colloquial elements can profitably be incorporated in writing without losing the qualities of conciseness and connectedness that distinguish writing from the relative looseness of (unprepared) speech. See also IDIOM; SLANG.

colon The main function of a colon is to 'deliver the goods' that were prepared in the first part of a sentence, e.g. 'In my opinion there are four main language activities: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.' In other words, the colon is an introducer. In this role it does neatly and simply what is otherwise often done clumsily by *namely* or *viz.* or even *that is, i.e., thus, or specifically*. Here are typical examples of its use:

> Only one course remains: to appeal to his better nature.
>
> I take either of two routes to Melbourne: the Hume Highway, through Albury, or the Princes Highway, along the coast.

He was a generous man: not only did he give his time unsparingly to the needy, but his hand was frequently in his pocket for good causes.

That is the way with walking: it is excellent exercise, toning all parts of the body that matter; but it is time-consuming.

In recording conversation, a comma is usually enough:

He declared, 'That's not what you promised.'

But the colon can be used for a quotation, particularly when there is no verb of saying (he *said*, she *declared*, etc.):

Shakespeare knew the answer: 'Brevity is the soul of wit.'

He put it to them directly: either accept or reject by tomorrow.

There is no need for the colon in:

I enjoy: jazz, rock, some pop, and most light classics.

She instructed them to: wash the dishes, make the beds and tidy up.

Bring items such as: blankets, pullovers and water bottles.

comma The chief function of the comma is to *separate* elements which would become confused if they flowed together. Most children have trouble with commas, but so do adults; indeed commas have been said to account for nine-tenths of poor punctuation. Some people don't use enough, others use too many. Omission can be momentarily confusing: 'While they were eating a rat ran by.' On the other hand, the insertion of too many commas will give the reader a jolty, slowed-down ride: 'Eventually, Huxley went to Lerici, in northern Italy, to join Lawrence, who had been there, off and on, for six months.' (All six of these commas could be left out to let the sentence flow.) Here are some further ideas on comma use or omission:

(1) An old 'rule' asserts that when two main clauses are joined by a conjunction a comma should precede the conjunction (e.g. 'The day grew cloudy, *and* the breeze stiffened'). In fact there is seldom a need for this comma when a sentence is short, but it may help the reader when a sentence is long, particularly if the second clause is rather different in meaning from the first.

The day grew cloudy *and* the breeze stiffened.

The day grew cloudy *but* it remained warm.

We applied to the authorities for permission to sell liquor in the restaurant, *and* on Tuesday we were granted a licence.

Hughes had a heavy cold and a sore throat *but* he was not deterred from speaking that afternoon.

Hughes had a heavy cold and a sore throat, *but* now it was necessary to concentrate on tomorrow's session.

I must examine the small cars, *for* my wife will soon need one. (A comma is almost always needed before *for* used as a conjunction, so that *for* won't be misread as a preposition.)

(2) Another such 'rule' requires a comma when a dependent or subordinate clause is joined to a main one (e.g. 'When I discussed it with him, he seemed enthusiastic.'); but now the tendency is to omit the comma:

When I discussed it with him he seemed enthusiastic.

Though I met him last year I doubt if I will know him.

But of course the comma is sometimes necessary to distinguish a meaning, as can be seen by examining the difference between these two sentences:

Although he felt tired, by the time he reached the city his spirits had risen.

Although he felt tired by the time he reached the city, his spirits had risen.

(3) Yet another old 'rule' requires a comma in front of *and* in a list of three or more items (e.g. Bread, butter, *and* tea.), but it is now usually omitted, except where there is a risk of ambiguity.

Bread, butter *and* tea.

We found very little gold, a promising amount of copper *and* a great deal of bauxite.

See you pack the sugar, the tea, *and* the salt and pepper.
There are three designs: in green, navy blue, *and* red, white and blue.

A modern tendency sometimes omits the *and* and uses a comma:

It yielded three results: more sales, more profit, more contracts.

(4) Commas normally enclose interrupting or parenthetical elements (e.g. 'He wrote, in all, about twenty novels.' 'This difficulty, I think you will agree, need not arise again.'). But weak parenthetical items, as italicised in these sentences, don't need commas:

The manager *too* was impressed.
In fact it is most unlikely.
And you should *by all means* accept the offer.
Adelaide's brightest jewel is *and will continue to be* the Festival.

On the other hand, a forceful parenthesis may need stronger punctuation than commas. To meet this need, dashes are available:

I have a plan — *I believe, a very practical plan* — to cope with this crisis.

(5) Special thought is always needed in using or omitting commas around relative clauses. Notice the great difference of meaning here:

The students *who are radical* have decided to protest.
The students, *who are radical,* have decided to protest.

The first means that only the radicals among the students will protest; the second, because of the commas, means that all the students will protest, and that all are radical.

(6) Though a comma can be omitted whenever it doesn't help the reader, we should make a practice of inserting one whenever we sense even vaguely that its omission might confuse the reader and make him go back over the sentence. Notice what would have happened if the commas had been omitted from these sentences:

Above all, nickel shares go on improving.
To start with, the cricketers are dissatisfied.

And we need to be on guard for sentences in which a comma is actually *required* to make the meaning clear. The meaning of these sentences would be quite different if the commas were removed:

She is only pretending, to please me.
Fraser, said Anthony, could depend on his loyalty.

comprise This word is often clumsily used where *have, include, consist, (be) composed of, constitute, form, (be) made up of* would more readily be understood, e.g. 'This cabinet *comprises (has)* six compartments'; 'This document is *comprised of (made up of)* four reports from specialists'.

confused words See WORDS OFTEN CONFUSED.

conjunctions and other connectors See CONNECTIVES.

connectedness The essence of writing is 'connectedness', says G.W. Turner — so different from the 'interchange' which he sees as the essence of conversational speech. How do writers achieve connectedness? First, *by being concise,* saying what needs to be said in as few words as possible. Second, *by sequencing sentences in logical order,* so the story or explanation flows smoothly. Third, *by using connective words* (see CONNECTIVES), not only the obvious conjunctions and prepositions but also a wide range of 'sentence connectors' such as 'moreover,' 'in conclusion,' 'not only . . . but also'. Fourth, *by using 'reference words'* such as 'this', 'that', 'their', which must be carefully placed to avoid ambiguous reference to the subject referred to. Fifth, *by occasionally repeating key words* in order to sustain a clear view of the subject matter (see REPETITION OF WORDS).

connectives? James Harris was the first to use this term, in 1751, when he perceived that some words have a special linking function in sentences. He was thinking only of conjunctions and prepositions; today we know the list is longer. Below is a comprehensive but not exhaustive review of the connectives at a good writer's command (their number is few in relation to the half million 'content' words in a good dictionary). 'All fluent and effective composition depends on the connectives,' declared the 19th century writer Thomas de Quincey — an overstatement perhaps, but not by much. Why not draw your class's attention to the connectives in their writing, then perhaps make a wall chart of selected connectives that gently extend the range you know the class is currently using?

(1) There are the 'Big Seven' small but much used connectives, known technically as COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS:
and, but, yet, or, nor, so, for

(2) Besides these 'seven' there are many other words that join whole statements and they are commonly termed SENTENCE CONNECTORS:

above all
accordingly
admittedly
afterwards
also
as a result
besides
certainly
clearly
consequently
earlier
finally
first . . . second
for example
for instance
for this reason
further(more)
hence
however
in addition
in conclusion
indeed
in fact
in order that
in particular
in short
instead
in summary
later
likewise
meanwhile
moreover
more specifically
nevertheless
nonetheless
not only...but also
not surprisingly
obviously
of course
one . . . two (other)
on the contrary
on the other hand
otherwise
rather
similarly
still
then
thereby
therefore
thus
to conclude
to sum up

A rough distinction is that the 'seven' *coordinating conjunctions* are very short words which join sentences rather tightly, while the *sentence connectors* are longer words or phrases which join sentences relatively loosely.

(3) There are the connectives that link adverbial constructions to sentences (they are known technically as SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS):

Cause/Result	*Contrast*	*Condition*	*Manner*	*Time/Place*
because	though	if	as	when/ever
since	although	unless	as if	after
so that	while	whether	as though	before
in order that	whereas	provided that		since
	than	on condition that		until
	even if			while
	even though			where/ever

(4) There are the numerous PREPOSITIONS — 'position words' such as *above, on, under, in, to, of, with* — which have an obvious connective function at the phrase level. They are handled with relative ease by children who are native speakers but they often trouble children who have not grown up with the idioms of English.

(5) There are the RELATIVE PRONOUNS — chiefly *who, whom, whose, which, that* — which connect relative ('adjectival') clauses to preceding subjects. (See also THAT OR WHICH?)

N.B. There is no point in learning lists of connectives by heart, but there is value in being broadly familiar with the range available. The extent of the range makes precision of meaning possible; at the same time, in deference to style, a writer will normally prefer the briefer, less formal-sounding, more speech-simple connectives. (See MACHINERY PHRASES.)

continual or continuous? There is a valuable distinction: *continual* means 'going on, but with interspersed breaks', e.g. 'Writing requires *continual* practice.'; *continuous* means 'going on without breaks', e.g. 'The ocean currents are in continuous motion.'

contractions See ABBREVIATION OR CONTRACTION?

could or might? See CAN OR MAY?

criteria This is the plural form, so only two or more things can be *criteria;* the singular is *criterion.* This word is, anyway, overused and can often be replaced to advantage by *qualities, standards, principles, tests, rules.*

curricula or **curriculums?** While *curricula* seems to be nearly universal when referring to 'all the courses of study available', there is a tendency to move to *curriculums* when referring to a number of specific courses, e.g. 'The curriculums in English, Science and Art are under review'.

dangling phrases Most commonly the 'dangler' is an opening phrase, e.g. '*Leaping into the saddle,* the horse galloped off', and it is corrected by supplying the right subject after the phrase. Phrases in other positions, however, can also 'dangle', e.g. 'They saw the Opera House *sailing on the harbour*'. A general vigilance is needed to avoid such 'dangling' lapses into ambiguity, for they are seldom as amusing as these two examples.

dashes See PARENTHETICAL DEVICES.

different from/to/than The old rule that *different from* is 'correct' while *different to* is wrong is now regarded by most authorities as insupportable. In Australia, *different to* is the more common usage, though *different from* is by no means uncommon; *different than,* which is strongly entrenched in American English, is used much less here, is rarely seen in print, but is probably increasing rapidly in our spoken English.

disinterested or uninterested? The useful distinction between these words is threatened by careless use of the first in places where the second would be appropriate. So do not say *disinterested* if you mean *not interested, lacking in interest, indifferent, apathetic,* or *uninterested.* Save *disinterested* for *impartial, unbiased, unprejudiced* or *detached.*

due to The old rule that *due to* must not be used as a preposition has been massively bypassed by nearly all English speakers and most writers, including the Queen in her 1957 speech to the Canadian Parliament: 'Due to inability to market their grain, prairie farmers have been forced . . .' Modern English has at its disposal a number of phrasal prepositions (e.g. *because of, owing to, as well as, in order to)* and the addition of *due to* is clearly — overdue! We could dispute whether *because of* or *owing to* might have been better choices for the Queen's sentence, but that would be a question of style not usage.

each other or one another? The natural tendency has been to use these phrases interchangeably, but some texts prefer *each other* for two ('The twins glared at *each other*') and *one another* for more than two ('The three women enjoy one another's company').

educationist or **educationalist?** Both forms are acceptable and the shorter is increasingly favoured.

effect See AFFECT OR EFFECT?

e.g. and i.e. In ordinary prose *for example* or *for instance* is preferable to the formal looking *e.g.:* and *that is* or *namely* is preferable to *i.e.* But the abbreviations are in order in concentrated expository prose. They do not need to be followed by a comma.

end product/end result In most uses these are clichés that deserve to be shortened or to be replaced by a more apt word, e.g. *product, result, end, outcome, upshot, consequence.*

enormity In the often horrific last quarter of the twentieth century, surely we need this word for what used to be its main meanings — 'outrageousness', 'atrociousness', 'monstrous wickedness'? To use it when we merely mean 'enormousness' or 'bigness' is a trivialisation.

enquiry or inquiry? They are interchangeable words, but *inquiry* seems to be more favoured in Australia, certainly in the sense of 'investigation'; *enquiry* is almost as common where the sense is 'asking'.

etc. Despairing school teachers often ban this word when their pupils write sentences like, 'I spend my week-ends playing, etc.' Yet *etc.* deserves a more discriminating attitude, for it has important uses, such as the shortening of tedious lists. But its place is mainly in concentrated expository writing rather than in general prose where many other and more elegant style choices are available, including: (1) introduce a list or series with *including, such as,* or *for example,* but do not then add *etc.* at the end of the list, (2) give a number of representative instances and add *and others* or *and so on,* (3) marshal the important points behind *especially, particularly, mainly* or *typically,* (4) omit all of these devices when the sentence provides enough items to make the meaning clear, e.g. 'The dairy industry must examine every aspect of milk, butter and cheese production if it is to survive' — a reader does not need any more detailed enumeration of dairy products in a general statement like this. (N.B. *etc.* is the universal form in English of what was in Latin *et cetera:* don't spell out the Latin form, and don't write *and etc.)*

everybody/everyone . . . they (them, their) An old 'correctness rule' has held that, because *every* is singular, *everybody* and *everyone* must also be singulars and be followed by singular pronouns, e.g. '*Everybody* was trying *his* hardest'. Today's revulsion against sexist language insists that this should be '. . .*his or her* hardest' — which is wordy and clumsy. What seems likely is that more and more people will follow the longstanding colloquial usages, *everybody . . . they, everyone . . . they* (e.g. '*Everybody* can't win, can *they?*' '*Everyone* believes *their* own ideas are best'). Many writers and perhaps half the usage authorities already accept this alternative. In such divided conditions, everybody should follow their own preference confidently!

exclamation mark The admen and signwriters have overdone and cheapened this mark; its effectiveness depends on its being used rarely. Frequent use indicates an inexperienced writer. Of course, it is necessary for genuinely exclamatory interjections, commands and appeals:

Hell! Hear, Hear! Ha, ha, ha! (*not* Ha! Ha! Ha!)
Right, get going! Onto your marks — move!
Are you blind! How dare you! Need you ask!

And for short sentences beginning with *how* or *what:*

How kind you are! What a marvellous show!

Otherwise we should resort to exclamation marks only when our words as written do not sufficiently show our strong emotion:

Our horse has won!
Your thought it wouldn't matter!
The real culprit is — you!
People like you should never have been born!

The art lies in restraint. Perhaps even that last example is nearly too long to be a genuine exclamation. Usually we can rely on our words to convey the emotion without the heavy-handed help of the exclamation mark. After all, a well-placed short sentence can be decisive, emphatic, even dramatic:

I disagree. Not so. That's unfortunate. Now let's go.
I trembled with fright. There's no point in worrying.

fad words and phrases They are new or old words that suddenly become fashionable in general speech or writing. A sampling since World War II: *fantastic, fabulous, incredible, trauma, viable, venue, feedback, hopefully, gorgeous, situation, paranoid, unbelievable, parameter, paradigm, nitty-gritty, hang-up, no way, meaningful dialogue, up the wall, point in time;* and similarly the tacking of *-wise* onto words ('I'm not very interested *politics-wise'*). They arise out of the infinite human capacity for word-coining and word-play, but through overuse they soon become boring. The best of them settle down to a quiet place in the normal vocabulary, e.g. *know-how, set-up, gimmick, image, status symbol.*

fewer or less? An eighteenth century rule prescribed, 'Use *less* for a quantity, *fewer for number', e.g. less* meat, *fewer* eggs. Though *less* had commonly been used for countable items up to that time, the subsequent teaching of the rule served to drive that use of *less* out of edited English. It remained strong, however, in speech and unedited writing (e.g. 'I have two less tickets than I thought I had'). Today, though its editing-out is not uncommon, there is a marked tendency towards more tolerance of *less* as an interchangeable usage with *fewer.*

first or firstly? Use either — there is no rule. An old pedantry held that we should say *first, secondly, thirdly,* etc., but the common practice in Australia has been *firstly, secondly,* etc. More recently there is a strong appearance of *first, second,* etc., and even some use of *one, two,* etc.

flammable or inflammable? There is a strong and commendable swing to *flammable.* Though both words mean 'easily set on fire', the prefix *in* — can dangerously cause *inflammable* to be interpreted as 'not easily set on fire'!

(as) follows/the following Often it is possible to avoid these introductory words by using a colon, e.g. 'He offered three reasons: first, there was not time to prepare an election; second, the electorate seemed about equally divided on the issues; third, dissension within the party made wholehearted campaigning impossible.' This is preferable to 'He offered three reasons as follows, first . . .'

foreign words and phrases Sensibly, the *AGPS Style Manual* says: 'The use of foreign words and phrases is only defensible when there is no exact English equivalent. Unless he is a linguist, the reader will be puzzled by exotic words. Whenever the idea can be adequately expressed in English, use English.'

formal words or plain words? Among the best advice given by H. W. Fowler was his call to avoid formal words that are 'not the plain English for what is meant'. He gave some examples, including: *cease* (stop), *commence* (begin), *complete* (finish), *conceal* (hide), *purchase* (buy), *vessel* (ship), *visualise* (foresee). Emphasising that he did not reject these formal words as words, for they can be appropriate in certain contexts, he declared that the less change there was from plain to formal the better, because few things contribute more to vigour of style than plain words. See also MACHINERY PHRASES; SIMPLER WORDS.

former/latter This is a rather clumsy device; it sounds heavily formal and often obliges the reader to backtrack for the meaning. Some suggestions: (1) avoid *former/latter* if you can; (2) certainly avoid it in spoken English, because backtracking is not possible; (3) prefer to repeat the words (antecedents) to which *former/latter* would refer; (4) when long phrases or sentences rather than single words need to be repeated in expository writing, *former/latter* can be used as a simpler alternative, but consider before doing so whether *first/second* could be even simpler. See also SIMPLER WORDS.

full stop (period), and elliptical dots (1) Elsewhere we've discussed the faults that arise from omitting a full stop (see RUN-ON SENTENCES) and using a comma in place of a full stop (termed *comma splice).* (2) Two other faults concerning the full stop are best discussed in relation to these sentences:

We asked how to get to Bourke Street.
I keep wondering what on earth I should do.
Gerry told him to get moving fast.
Red faced and angry, he screamed the command.

An inexperienced writer might put question marks at the end of the first two sentences and exclamation marks at the end of the last two. But these sentences are *about* questions and commands, so they require only full stops. (3) To show an ellipsis (words left out), use three dots, whether the ellipsis occurs within the sentence or at the end. (Some usage guides prefer to add a fourth dot, representing a full stop, when the ellipsis is at the end.)

To be . . . is the question.
To be or not to be . . .

Different from an ellipsis is the device used (very occasionally) by writers to indicate a dying away of thought, apprehension about the future, etc. This too is indicated by three dots at the end:

> In the brooding silence he became aware of a clock ticking, and he began to count, one, two, three, four, five . . .

got Though many respected authorities on usage have urged tolerance of *got*, the word is still frowned on by some teachers. Marckwardt and Walcott (1938) researched the compulsion sense of *got* (e.g. 'You have *got* to do it'), which is the word's most disputed sense, and they cited Ruskin, Disraeli, Dickens, Eliot, Wilde, Shaw, Trollope and others to justify calling such usage 'literary English'. Faced with facts like these the critics usually resort to saying, 'But *got* is an ugly word'. Why not then campaign to bury *but,* which is similar in sound — or *God?* F. T. Wood, in his *Current English Usage,* 1962, says, 'The use or non-use of *got* may well be left to the good taste and linguistic sense of the individual'.

grapholect The technical term for a national written language. This language is distinctly separate from the dialects of the nation ('It is transdialectal in character, an artificial construct that belongs to no group or place in particular, though of course it has greatest currency among those who have been most intensively trained in its use.' — Hirsch). It is highly conventional, strongly resistant to change, and its conventions need to be taught in the nation's schools. (Ref.: E. D. Hirsch, *The Philosophy of Composition,* Uni. of Chicago Press, 1977, pp 34-50; and Leo Daugherty, 'The English Grapholect . . .', in *College Composition and Communication,* N.C.T.E., Ill., May 1979, pp. 134-140.) The foregoing remarks apply to most of the published and formal uses of the national written language; informal writing, of course, will move towards dialectal forms and will be more flexible. Even the grapholect in its highly formal uses is not completely prescriptive. At a number of points it allows scope for personal preference — what one writer cautiously terms 'wiggle room'. His example is the opener, 'In the section on "Writing" he is so intent . . .', in which he chose not to insert a comma after "Writing". The grapholect here allowed two possibilities. (Ref: R. W. Reising, in *College Composition and Communication,* Oct. 1979, p. 316.)

however See BUT OR HOWEVER?

hyphens Opinions differ on whether they should be used more or avoided wherever possible. Writers can therefore choose — but in the light of at least four functions of hyphens. (1) The process of language change tends to bring some combinations of words together, with the hyphen in a transitional role, e.g. *gum leaf, gum-leaf, gumleaf.* (2) Hyphens link words into a unity which has a meaning of its own, e.g. the *not-so-wealthy,* a *teach-in,* another *hippie-that-was.* (3) Hyphens can help the reader by linking closely related words when they might otherwise be stumbled over, as in 'the next door house' *(next-door)*. (4) Hyphens can create novel combinations of words which assist reading and highlight a point, e.g. 'He adopted a ruthless, go-at-them-from-the-jump attitude'. This last kind should be used with restraint, but it need not be avoided, for as one writer says it gives us 'a chance to play around with the language and invent some nice combinations' (Rudolf Flesch).

idiom Idiom is, broadly, the expressions or phrases of a language that are peculiar to it. Native speakers are unaware of the 'peculiarity', but it is troublesome to foreigners. For instance, these idiomatic prepositions understandably sound odd to them: 'Chop the tree *down*, then chop it *up*'; 'Please join me *in* a cup of tea'; 'He runs *down* his friends when their backs are turned'. We need to be aware that idiom shades into slang which is inappropriate in writing, e.g. *get cracking, on the nose, pull the finger out,* and worse. Short of these, writers have plenty of scope: 'In standard spoken and written English today idiom is an established, universal and essential element that, used with care, ornaments and enriches the language' (V. H. Collins, *Book of English Idioms,* 1961). See also COLLOQUIAL; SLANG.

imply or **infer?** The useful distinction between these words is often carelessly confused. To *imply* something is to hint it rather than say it outright; to *infer* is to get the hint—or to 'deduce' or 'conclude from' what has been said. In general, a speaker or writer *implies*; a listener or reader *infers*.

in the circumstances See CIRCUMSTANCES, IN OR UNDER?

inflammable See FLAMMABLE OR INFLAMMABLE?

inquiry See ENQUIRY OR INQUIRY?

insofar or in so far? Authorities differ. The tendency in Australia is towards the single word.

invention This was the first of the five divisions of classical rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, delivery). It is traditionally defined in narrow Aristotelian terms as 'the discovery of the available means of persuasion in any situation', i.e. the finding of good arguments. More broadly today it is the discovery of subject matter for writing. Some teachers tend to use 'invention' synonymously with 'pre-writing', the exploration of ideas that precedes and leads to writing. This is a limited view. Modern researchers of the writing process emphasise that we do not think up all our ideas *before* writing. Some ideas come later, during writing and revision. Indeed, the writing often leads us to discard pre-writing plans — to take a new direction and think up new ideas.

-ise or -ize? There has long been huge confusion over the use of these suffixes. Only a student of classical Greek has a chance of confidently knowing when to use one and not the other. In a bid to rescue us from the mess, the *AGPS Style Manual* urges: 'Spell all words with *-ise, -isation, -ising* (not *-ize*, etc.) when these are suffixes. Note, however, that *-ize* is needed in the following words, in which it is not a suffix: apprize (value), prize, size, seize'.

it This humble, useful word is perilously easy to use confusingly. 'Never put *it* on paper', warned William Cobbett long ago, 'without thinking what you are about.' In other words, use *it* (or *its*) only when its reference to a preceding subject is perfectly clear; otherwise the reader is condemned to puzzlement or ambiguity.

'it is me' or 'it is I'? This hoary issue has so amiably divided both experts and non-experts for so long that a 'please yourself' consensus now exists. Anyway, it was always a textbookish non-issue. *It is me* was the going currency in informal speech and writing, while neither it nor *it is I* had occasion to occur in formal speech or writing.

italics As every published writer knows, italics are one of the great style resources of printed English. The convention used by authors is to underline a typed word and this is then typeset in italic script by the publisher. We should not deny this resource to child writers. They should be encouraged to underline words they wish to emphasise, but of course sparingly.

its or it's? This simple rule to apply here is: Only use the apostrophe for the contraction of the two words, *it is* and *it has*. ('It's time to go.') *Its* is one of a small handful of 'pure' possessives which do not use an apostrophe; they include *his, their, your, our.*

jargon In early English, *jargon* meant the twittering of birds; hence, today, unintelligible human chatter. The word is usually invoked in criticism of ponderous, pedantic or pretentious language — especially technical or professional language — for which the writer or speaker could well have found a 'plain English' equivalent. A second meaning applies the word non-critically to any 'technical language' used comfortably within a specialist group; such specialists, however, should feel socially obliged to translate or explain their 'jargon' in ordinary language when talking to non-specialists.

latter See FORMER/LATTER.

like or as? *Like* is accepted as a preposition ('She looks *like* you'), but its use as a conjunction has long been condemned by purists, who would substitute *as* (e.g. in the ad, 'Winston tastes good, *like* a cigarette should'). The sphere of action of conjunctive *like* is rapidly increasing in Australian as in American usage and there are strong arguments for tolerating it (see, for example, Margaret Bryant, *Modern English and Its Heritage*, Macmillan N.Y., 1966); but the majority of usage authorities seem still to favour *as*, certainly in edited writing.

literally It means *really, actually* (the opposite of 'metaphorically'), yet neither education nor ridicule has killed its misuse as a simple intensifier (e.g. 'It *literally* rained cats and dogs', 'The Premier has been *literally* caught with his pants down in this dispute'). Teachers can only keep trying.

loan as a verb For generations our classrooms have taught the simple doctrine, '*loan* is a noun, *lend* is a verb', while in the playground the reverse has usually prevailed: 'Will you give us a *lend* of your ruler?', 'Can you *loan* us the price of a pie?' There is little support for this colloquial use of *lend* at formal levels, but the case for general acceptance of *loan* as a verb as well as a noun is strong.

lot/lots (of)/a lot (of) The trend to a less formal style in writing is bringing these into greater use. Less tolerant times would have insisted on substituting, say, *a great deal, a good deal, a large quantity* (or *number), many,* or *much.* Many modern writers do not hesitate to use *lot(s).* N.B. *A lot* cannot be spelt as one word.

machinery phrases (and words) These are clumsy, formal-sounding phrases which good writers either drop or replace with something brighter. Phrases like *in connection with, with reference to,* and *regarding the question whether* can usually be eliminated with a little thought, especially if we think what we might say in person-to-person speech. Other phrases can be shortened, often to a single word: *if and when (when), inasmuch as (since), insofar as . . . is concerned (as to . . .).* Usually it is not difficult to avoid very formal words like *hereof, thereto, hereby*; and personal and narrative writing seldom needs words like *thus, therefore, furthermore, moreover. See also* FORMAL WORDS; REDUNDANCY; SIMPLER WORDS.

may See CAN OR MAY (COULD OR MIGHT)?

media Oversimplified is the commonly heard rule: *medium* is singular, *media* plural. *Mediums* is often a legitimate alternative plural and its use seems to be increasing as speakers and writers feel a need to distinguish their means/instruments/agencies/etc. from *media* in the pervasive sense of 'mass communications media'. For example, Sylvia Ashton-Warner in *Teacher* says that her pupils move on from vocabulary work to 'other mediums of expression'. (*Media* as a singular and *medias* as a plural are still generally condemned.)

mixed metaphor and sustained metaphor This is the writing of two disparate images side by side, e.g. 'to cut the gap between', or 'iron out his mental blocks,' or, as one Australian politician said of another, 'He likes to sit on the fence while he keeps an ear to the ground.' But the search for mixed metaphors can easily go too far. Perhaps only a pedant would condemn Shakespeare for saying, 'To take arms against a sea of troubles . . .'. Any *sustaining* of a metaphor beyond two images calls for skilful writing if 'mixing' and contrivance are to be avoided. However the deliberate writing of *sustained metaphors* for fun or syntactic practice can be rewarding. An adult example:

Q. Can you write a sustained metaphor which presents you as a bowerbird?

A. I've always been a bowerbird, picking up scraps of ideas and alert for shiny slivers of insight; but for the past five years I've flown in ever-expanding circles, increasingly eager to build my mind's bower as a place for deeper reflection.

I've gathered my construction materials from natural resources: the feathers of memory, the creepers of interest, the grasses of effort, the mosses of concentration, weaving them together with vines of association and spiking them through with golden flowers in loving memory of all those who, since my fledgling days, have nurtured my unsteady growth.

Within the privacy of my bower, I move to my own special rhythm, now dancing and singing, now sitting silent as I examine newly gathered fruits. I'm content to remain a bowerbird, building each bower to a more complex design, and perhaps I'll find for my final resting place that most elusive shining object: *wisdom*. (Laurel Dumbrell)

MS This is the universally accepted abbreviation for *manuscript*, a writer's finished piece of writing, ready for handing to the publisher. The plural is *MSS*. A full-stop after either form is optional, but current usage favours dispensing with it. (The use of lower case, *ms* and *mss*, is also optional.)

myself or **me?** *Myself* seems to be as much used as *me* in sentences like, 'The prize will be split between the President and *myself* (me)'. Some usage authorities approve it as 'modest, polite, and courteous' (Pooley) but a larger number feel that it is 'a prissy evasion of me' (High[illegible]).

nice Though vilified by generations of teachers, *nice* remains firmly entrenched in conversational English. There is usually a good case for thinking of a more exact word when we are writing, for *nice* comes too readily to mind as an all-purpose adjective for *pretty, attractive, pleasant, friendly, warm, harmonious* — and, indeed, hundreds of other meanings. On the other hand, *nice* deserves to be used more for its precise meanings — subtle, sensitive, deft, discriminative, etc. — which take up most of the space given to it in dictionaries.

none . . . is or none . . . are? An old rule claims *none* as a singular only; but most usage authorities now recognise also the plural form. ('Though some of these economic policies found their way into Labor Party platforms, none of them were acted upon . . .')

one another See EACH OTHER OR ONE ANOTHER?

one . . . one or one . . . he/his? Should we write, '*One* ought to state *one's* beliefs . . .' or '*One* ought to state *his* beliefs . . .'? The first form has long been taught as correct in British and Australian schools and the second in American schools. Neither is 'correct' in an absolute sense, and probably both are better avoided in the interests of elegance. But if one form is needed there is a recent reason for staying with the relatively impersonal British-Australian form: to say 'one . . . he' is sexist and therefore needs the cumbersome 'one . . . he or she'.

only This could be the most flexible modifier in our language. Notice that *only* can be slipped into any position in this sentence: 'He told her that he loved her'. But this flexibility can be dangerous, for each position brings a different shade of meaning and obliges us to place the word carefully to avoid ambiguity. (Similar words that can give trouble are *almost, nearly, even, just.)* Logicians and rule-makers would like to see *only* placed in front of the word it modifies and this is the safest rule where precision is important; but on most occasions we can be guided by what 'sounds right'. Indeed, Gowers has said, '. . . those who are over-fussy about the placing of the adverb *only* are the sort of friends from whom the English language may well pray to be saved' (MEU, p. vii).

paragraphs Until recently we thought we knew all about 'the paragraph': 'Just divide your subject into a logical sequence of steps and expound each step in a *paragraph*, which is a number of sentences related by meaning; the first sentence will (almost always) be the *topic sentence*, while the sentences that follow it will add details or explanation'. Simple!

But many real life paragraphs turn out to be different. Newspapers use single-sentence ones because anything longer looks bad in a narrow column. Some magazines, with columns a little wider, don't allow theirs to be longer than two or three average sentences. Many good writers use occasional single-sentence paragraphs to achieve dramatic emphasis; others, having drafted a long, logical paragraph, break it into several shorter ones to avoid a 'heavy' look.

Increasingly, it seems, paragraphing is more art than logic and, like the art of punctuating, its main concern is to make reading easier. Rudolf Flesch in *The ABC of Style* goes so far as to say: 'Paragraphs are a convenience to the reader: it's always better to have too many paragraphs than too few. When in doubt start a new paragraph.'

As to the 'topic sentence', by all means explain the old dogma that one should begin every paragraph. It retains considerable relevance in academic essay-writing. But don't send children searching for topic sentences in modern literature. Awful confusion will result; for example, inconclusive disputes about which, if any, sentence states the 'topic', or suspicions that some topic sentences really govern a series of paragraphs, or even that the last sentence in some paragraphs, and not the first, is the topic sentence.

Far better to focus children's attention on what they have to say and simply suggest that they try to arrange their paragraphs to please their readers. Then, when you respond to their writing, you may say, 'That par. is hefty looking — where might you break it?' Or, 'I notice you separate this short par. from that, but would you get a smoother effect if you linked them?' And so on. This is treating paragraphing as a reader-oriented art which tries to balance the claims of logic, connectedness, pace, appearance and tone.

parallelism This is the equal ranking or coordination of elements in a sentence that are parallel in meaning, e.g. 'Bob started early, *worked* hard, and *retired* late.' Three like elements are here arranged in parallel structures, each consisting of a past-tense verb with an adverb. But if the sentence had read, 'Bob *started* early, *worked* hard, and *used to retire* late', this would be faulty parallelism because the third element is structured differently from the first two. Another form of faulty parallelism: 'This oil will keep your engine rust-free, friction-free, and prolong its life.' Here the last element does not follow consistently from *keep your engine;* so parallelism requires e.g. '. . . will keep your engine rust-free and friction-free and will prolong its life' — which keeps the first two elements parallel and separates the unlike third element into an independent clause. There is another and sometimes subtler faulty parallelism in which the grammatical structures are equal but the ideas are not and should not be joined, e.g. 'She liked the office routine — the steady work-flow, the regular breaks, and the pleasant staff.' Here *work-flow* and *breaks* are parts of the routine, but *staff* are not. The sentence needs to be re-cast.

parenthetical devices Inserted or parenthetical material can be marked off in any of four ways: by commas, by dashes, by round brackets (termed *parentheses*), and by square brackets (termed *brackets*).

(1) **Commas.** Generally commas are able to mark off from the rest of a sentence any inserted but closely related thought, e.g. 'Most writers, *for very good reasons*, put clarity ahead of every other quality.' See COMMA.

(2) **Dashes.** The dash is a strong, attention-getting mark; it has to be used with restraint so that it doesn't wear out its audience-impact. When in doubt as to whether dashes are justified, be content with commas; they usually serve well enough. Here are the main uses of dashes.

To mark a forceful parenthetic statement:
His reasons — such as they are — have been expressed persuasively.
I believe this team — Wallace for president, Smith for secretary, Crisp for treasurer — is the best the Club has ever had.

To summarise or gather up the items in an enumeration:
Faith, hope and charity — these certainly would save us.
The bulk, the assurance, the pugnacious glare, the clipped, perfect phrasing, and of course the cigar — all this was vintage Churchill.

To mark an interruption:
Next we journeyed to Rome, intending to visit St Peters — but I'm boring you!

To point-up a strong emphasis:
The real culprit was — you!
'Let's face it — now!' (A charity advertisement.)

To express an afterthought or self-correction in hasty writing:
We stayed in Melbourne a week — or actually five days.

Although, generally, there should be no afterthoughts in careful writing, writers sometimes use them to achieve rhetorical effects:
He thought of Tasmania as another country — as it is in some ways.
I think — in fact I'm certain — that you can't succeed.

(3) **Parentheses ( ).** If dashes tend to highlight, parentheses tend to fence off and play down. Look at the difference between:
The cattle I like best — Illawarras — are in that pavilion.
The cattle I like best (Illawarras) are in that pavilion.
The dashes draw attention to what they enclose; but the parentheses so thoroughly shut off what they enclose that our attention usually remains on the rest of the sentence.
As a rule parentheses should be used even less frequently than dashes. Some suggestions: (a) When the parentheses are at the end of a sentence, the full-stop comes after, e.g. 'I've known him for years (I'm sorry to say).' (b) When the parentheses enclose an independent sentence, the full-stop comes within, e.g. 'They arrived on time. (All ten were present.) We greeted them warmly.' (c) Any comma, semicolon or colon that would have been used before a parenthetical insertion if this insertion had not been made is generally placed after it; this and some other points in punctuating with parentheses show in these sentences:
There was Bill (my old mate) standing there.
There was Bill (my old mate), now in a suit, standing there.
Later (p. 79), you will hear more of this.
Here is the list (not a long one): posts, wire, strainers, staples.

A novelist called Lessing (do you know her?) is to speak.
Cook arrived on April 2 (?) at the mouth of the bay.

(4) **Brackets.** [ ]. The main use for these is to insert an explanation or correction when quoting something by another author; that is, to interpolate an editorial comment. Square brackets appear almost exclusively in typeset printed material (few typewriters carry them).
'Napoleon threatened to humble the young Tsar [Alexander I].'
'They [B.H.P.] will bring the case before the court.'
'The jury awarded £200 [$400] to the injured man.'
'Marsden ordered the villian [sic] to be lashed.'

Brackets can also be used for an insertion within parentheses:
(See Chapter 12 [The Wombat's Home] for further information.)

passive See ACTIVE OR PASSIVE?

per se This Latinism appears more and more frequently, just when most others are being discarded for English equivalents. It means *as such*. So why not say *as such*?
See also FOREIGN WORDS AND PHRASES.

place names A simplifying tendency drops the apostrophe from place names, as in *Coopers Creek, Flinders Range*.

positive preferred Prefer to tell the reader what *is*, rather than what is not. *'The scheme was not successful'* is generally improved by writing, *'The scheme failed.'* Another example: *'There's no point in our declining to meet him'* ('Let's agree *to meet him'*).

possessives See APOSTROPHES.

prepositions at end Despite an ancient dogma that they shouldn't, reputable writers past and present do end sentences with prepositions. Not always, of course. The preposition can sound clumsy at the end, and then another construction should be used, e.g. 'That is the song he is the composer *of'* ('That is the song he composed'). But it can sound perfectly natural, e.g. 'She makes a good job of anything she is interested *in'*. Fowler says that those who condemn the final preposition as 'inelegant' are 'unconsciously trying to deprive the English language of a valuable idiomatic resource, which has been used freely by all our greatest writers except those whose instinct for English idiom has been overpowered by notions of correctness derived from Latin standards'.

pronoun reference When using pronouns like *it, he, she, they, this, these, which,* be sure they refer clearly and unambiguously to a preceding subject. Otherwise there is faulty reference, like this: 'When the Minister attacked the Member for Hughes *he* flushed darkly'. (Does *he* refer to *Minister* or *Member*? More often, faulty reference is found in longer passages where the straying pronoun is a sentence or two away from what it hopes to refer to, e.g. 'South Australia has decided to reduce the voting age to 18. There are of course a number of opponents, but they are in the minority. *This* is a step in the right direction because . . .' . (*This,* lacking a clear close referent, makes the reader wonder.) Special care is needed with *which*. It should be kept as close as possible to the noun it refers to, so that we avoid lapses of the kind dramatised by the typical copybook sentence: 'A lump rose on his head *which* was the size of an egg.' *Which* can also be perilous when it is used to refer loosely to the whole sense of what precedes it, e.g. 'Each office has two typewriters and a calculating machine, *which* is convenient for your kind of business.' (The reader must pause to decide whether *which* refers to the calculating machine or to all the equipment mentioned.) Yet this loose referent for *which* need not always be avoided. Many good writers use it when there is no risk of ambiguity, e.g. 'We set out in June, *which* meant that winter was under way.'

pronoun usage (elementary) (1) In the primary school, intensive teaching of the grammatical case of pronouns is not advisable, but teachers can directly point, in practical situations, to the distinction between subject and object forms, perhaps with the backing of a small wallchart:

PERSONAL PRONOUNS:

Person	SUBJECT	OBJECT	POSSESSION
1st	I, we	me, us	my, our
2nd	you	you	your
3rd	he, she, it, they	him, her, it, them	his, her, its, their

e.g. George and I (not *me)* asked the teacher.
The teacher answered George and me (not *I*).
We (not *us)* children often ask questions.
The teacher answers questions from us (not *we)* children.

(2) The following pronouns are singular and govern related verbs and (usually) pronouns in the singular: each, every, either, neither, everybody, anybody, anyone, everyone, nobody.

e.g. *Everyone* in the class *was* (not *were)* interviewed.
However, in common usage the plural pronouns *they, them, their* often appear after *everybody, anybody, everyone, anyone.* e.g. *Everyone* can concentrate, but *they* seldom do.

(3) The following pronouns take either a singular or a plural verb, depending on the sense of the sentence: none, any, some, all, enough. (See also NONE . . . IS?)

e.g. All *is* well. All *are* ready to go.

punctuation Punctuation is more than a set of rules; it is an art. The modern practice of this art requires that its marks be used only where they help the reader, not wherever there is some excuse in the structure of the sentences for using them: too many are as offensive to good writing as too few. This means that the skilled punctuator is a person with a strong sense of 'reader awareness' which enables him to look over what he has written, notice the places where his reader might stumble or miss an intended meaning, and then insert the marks that will ensure smooth reading. Good writing yields its meaning at the first reading, without even momentary confusion. Look at these sentences:

1. When I've cleared these off the table may be used.
2. While she was cooking the baby wandered away.
3. He does not like beef and pork is too dear.
4. As I said before you arrived there was no argument.

The simple comma (after *off, cooking, beef, said)* would have saved the reader from confusion.

PUNCTUATION FOR VARIOUS EFFECTS Though few, the marks of punctuation try to do for the eye all the things that stress, pause and intonation do for the ear. They can be used flexibly to secure a variety of effects. Punctuation shows most clearly as an art when we see the same passage punctuated in various ways for various effects:

1. Before punctuation (showing speech divisions) —
   I saw *Love Story* last night/a good show/it's perhaps overrated by the publicity/but it's worth seeing again.
2. Punctuated for matter-of-fact, formal tone
   I saw *Love Story* last night. A good show, it is perhaps overrated by the publicity; but it is worth seeing again.
3. Punctuated for a tone of qualified approval —
   I saw *Love Story* last night. A good show. It is perhaps overrated by the publicity; but it is worth seeing again.

4. Punctuated for an enthusiastic, intimate tone —

    I saw *Love Story* last night — a good show! It's perhaps overrated by the publicity. But it's worth seeing again.

Of course, as well as having a choice of punctuation marks, we can achieve subtle shifts of meaning by combining effective punctuation with small changes of wording. One example:

I went to town but returned empty-handed.
I went to town, but I returned empty-handed.
I went to town; but I returned empty-handed.
I went to town. But I returned empty-handed.
I went to town; however, I returned empty-handed.
I went to town. However, I returned empty-handed.
I went to town. I returned, however, empty-handed.
I went to town. I returned empty-handed, however.

question mark Children's main difficulty with this mark is remembering to insert it. Apart from that, here are some ways to use it for special effect.

A question may be used to enliven a lengthy exposition:
Should we raise controversial issues? Yes, but not too often.
Questions may be used to achieve an oratorical effect:
How many of us remember the good old days? When unemployment was widespread? When wages were cut? And fascism loomed?
In briefer pieces, capital letters are usually left out:
Will you let me know what kinds? in what quantities? and where to deliver?

A question mark may be used to indicate a doubt:
It was written by the first Lord Darnley (1617?-1693).
The used car salesman says it is in excellent (?) condition.
When a statement rather than a question is intended, the question mark may be omitted:
Would you return the book when you have finished it.

quotation marks The complexities of their use are admirably expounded in the AGPS *Style Manual* and can only be summarised here.

Use single quotation marks; but for a quote-within-a-quote, use double marks within the single:

I told the class: ‘The first words of Melville's *Moby Dick* are, “Call me Ishmael”, and they are full of significance’.

When words are quoted within a sentence, the punctuation marks of the sentence must fall outside the quotation marks:

How should we study the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’?

But punctuation marks that are part of the quotation are placed inside the quotation marks:

He shouted ‘Stop, thief!’ but the robber got away.

When the whole of a sentence is a quotation, even though it may be broken by an interpolation, place the full stop before the last quotation mark:

‘The history of printing is . . . the history of the title-page.’
‘The history of printing’, says Stanley Morison, ‘is in large measure the history of the title-page.’

When a quotation within a sentence is itself a complete sentence, make one full stop do duty for both; but place this after the quotation mark:

Stanley Morison says: ‘The history of printing is in large measure the history of the title page’.

Similarly, make one question mark do duty for two:

Did he say: ‘Am I my brother's keeper’?

But when different punctuation marks fall together, write them in this way:

Did he hear the Speaker call 'Order!'?

reason . . . is because This usage is common and seems to be increasing but it contains an element of redundancy which is easily avoided: (1) by preferring *reason . . . is that;* or (2) by dropping *the reason . . . is.* Compare 'The *reason* he walks *is because* it is healthier' with: (1) 'The reason he walks is that it is healthier,' (2) 'He walks because it is healthier.'

recurrence Though *reoccurence* is common in Australian colloquial speech, *recurrence* prevails in careful speech and edited writing.

redundancy A writer who uses needlessly repetitious words is guilty of *redundancy* (or *pleonasm).* A similar term is *tautology,* though it is more often applied to clear instances of saying something twice (ascend *up, two* twins, crowded *full,* problems *and difficulties).* For more general wordiness there are also the terms *verbosity* and *prolixity,* which tend now to be applied to speech rather than writing — talking for talking's sake, whether it is endless chatter or a pompous flow. In the following phrases, the italicised words can usually be dropped:

absolute perfection
authority *in his own right*
appointed *to the post of*
bold *and audacious*
definite decision
during *the course of*
eliminate *altogether*
face *up to*
future prospect
hot water heater
involved in a car crash
just recently
major breakthrough
mutual cooperation
never *at any time*
poor state of disrepair
regular monthly meetings
smile *on his face*

See also MACHINERY PHRASES; SIMPLER WORDS.

register This is the currently prevailing term for what used to be called a 'level of usage' or 'appropriate style of language-use': a fairly regular, fairly predictable range of language-use which is appropriate to the purpose and audience in, broadly, recurring situations, e.g. intimate, casual (or informal), formal, scientific, oratorical.

repetition of words Mark Twain once said: 'I do not find that the repetition of an important word a few times — say three or four times — in a paragraph troubles my ear if clearness of meaning is best secured thereby. But tautological repetition which has no justifying object . . . that is another matter.' A classical example of effective uses of repetition is Francis Bacon's essay 'Of Studies'. See also REDUNDANCY.

rhetoric Few words have had to carry more shifts of meaning than this one. Today the florid speechifying of unprincipled politicians is commonly referred to as rhetoric. This is a complete degeneration since the early Greeks, who saw rhetoric as the noble art of arriving at the truth. The shift in meaning began, however, under the Greeks themselves. The word became identified with learning, and later Greeks used it to describe educational courses which opened the door to the professions, courses embracing grammar, literature, public speaking, reading, writing, logic, philosophy and history. Then a great split occurred, with the followers of Plato arguing that rhetoric should solely concern itself with arriving at the truth on any subject while the followers of Aristotle argued that its concern should be the persuasion of an audience. In the Middle Ages it was usually Aristotle's view that gained credence, producing courses which emphasised the persuasive forms and mannerisms of speech-making and writing — the primacy of an artificial 'style' over content. Many U.S. university courses in rhetoric have striven (and continue to strive) to rescue 'rhetoric' from both its narrow Aristotelian meaning and its crass reduction as the highly suspect speech-making and writing of modern demagogues. Here, for example, is an authoritative attempt to define 'rhetoric' very broadly: 'The word *rhetoric* can be traced back ultimately to the simple assertion *I say (eiro* in Greek). Almost anything related to the act of saying something to someone — in speech or in writing — can conceivably fall within the domain of rhetoric as a field of study: phonetics, grammar, the process of cognition, language acquisition, perception, penmanship, social relations, persuasive strategies, stylistics, logic, and so on.' — Young, Becker, and Pike, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* (Harcourt, Brace & World, N.Y., 1970). Thus 'rhetoric' largely returns to an identification with processes which facilitate learning through the conscious arts of using language. For fifteen short essays on modern studies of rhetoric, see *Rhetoric: Theories for Application*, ed. Robert M. Gorrall (N.C.T.E., Illinois, 1967). For a major treatment of rhetoric, see *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, by Edward P. J. Corbett (O.U.P., N.Y., 1965, and later editions). See also INVENTION.

round See AROUND OR ROUND?

run-on sentences A 'run-on', 'fused', or 'run-together' sentence is a construction in which two or more sentences are not separated by a full-stop (or semicolon) or joined by a conjunction. For example, 'The traffic was thick in the city near the Cenotaph we were unable to find parking'. (The writer's failure to insert a full-stop leaves the reader wondering whether it should go before or after *near the Cenotaph.)* A similar fault is the 'comma-splice': two sentences, instead of being separated by a full-stop or semicolon, are wrongly joined by a comma. For example, 'He knocked politely, when the door opened he was confronted by an angry man.'

semicolon Despite its name, the semicolon is not a half-colon; it is a punctuation mark in its own right. A good deal stronger than a comma, it is perhaps best described (in most of its uses) as a reduced full stop. Indeed, here is a good general rule: use a semicolon where a full stop is possible but would separate sentences too strongly. Here are some of the uses of semicolons.

(1) Between main clauses (sentences) not joined by a conjunction:
The guests are arriving; some have nearly reached the door.
I said it would rain today; it seems I wasn't far wrong.

(2) In front of sentence connectors (conjunctive adverbs) like *moreover, therefore, nevertheless, in fact, on the other hand:*
He approves your plan; moreover he will actively advocate it.
Hitler had good reason to sign at once; on the other hand, there was a chance that more concessions might be extracted.

(3) To clarify a series construction, especially when the elements in the series contain commas:
On the platform were Tom, the treasurer; Bill, the secretary; and Don, the president-elect.
The day was blue, gold, glorious; sunny, without being hot; breezy, but by no means windy; filled everywhere with the scent of wattles, then in loveliest bloom.

sentence combining A method of improving 'sentence dexterity' by teaching children to 'embed' propositions within other propositions. It has become fashionable in the U.S. in recent years, to some extent taking the place of 'sentence diagramming' (clause analysis). A typical example:

The girl called for help. (ING).
The girl dived into the pool to save the child.
The girl was fully clothed. (WHO).

This example uses bracketed 'cues'; other examples may be left 'open'. There is seldom only one correct answer; thus several other versions would be acceptable apart from this:

Calling for help, the girl, who was fully clothed, dived into the pool to save the child.

Strong claims have been made for the value of the method, while critics attack its formality and the triviality of many examples.

sentences Attention to sentence structure and variety can help us write better prose. Most sentences we have to write offer us choices of structure — style choices. Children grasp this if they experiment occasionally with rewriting sentences in different ways or if they combine, say, three elements (e.g. they set out early/they reached the mountain top at midday/they took photos) in several sentence forms. The potential variety is great. (See SENTENCE COMBINING.)

The best general advice about sentences is: *strive for conciseness*, that is, try to say what is needed in as few words as possible. Generally, *short sentences* are good for most writers most of the time, especially for young writers, but this need not inhibit some writing of longer sentences. Then it is usually desirable *to place the main point of a long sentence at the beginning;* this will save the reader from wondering what the point is, as in 'Even though we were worried, with all sorts of conflicting rumours circulating, and no chance of contacting the airport authorities, we decided to wait till official news came through'; instead we can invert the sentence to read 'We decided to wait till official news came through, even . . .' See also PARALLELISM; RUN-ON SENTENCES; SENTENCE COMBINING; VERBLESS SENTENCES.

sexist language Whole books are now being written on this subject. They address the problem that the human race in general and the English language in particular are strongly male-oriented and they urge equal treatment of men and women (or women and men?) through sex-fair language. There is not room here to explore the extensive ramifications of sexist language ('Man is a mammal', Mr Chairman, etc.) nor the related issue of sexual stereotypes ('A nurse . . . she . . .', 'An executive . . . he . . .', etc.). Teachers, writers and editors usually find that the most common problem they face is that of the 'generic *he*': 'The student . . . he (his, him, himself) . . .' A number of non-sexist alternatives are available: *he or she, she or he, (s)he, s/he,* and the rewriting of the sentence so as to either use *they* or eliminate any pronoun reference at all. For example.

The student finds *he* has no rights here. *(sexist)*
The student finds *he or she* has no rights here. (or *s/he)*
Students find *they* have no rights here.
Students find there are no rights here.

The U.S. National Council of Teachers of English makes available to prospective contributors a set of *Guidelines for the Non-sexist Use of Language* (N.C.T.E., 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801, U.S.A.). A valuable book is *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing,* by Casey Miller and Kate Swift (Lippincott, N.Y., 1980).

shall or will (should or would)? The old and complex rules which tried to distinguish sharply between the uses of these words were never widely understood. (In Australia a grossly oversimplified version of the rules was taught for generations, often with missionary zeal: that *shall* is used in the first person, as *I* or *we shall;* and *will* in the second and third person, as *he, she, it, you, they will;* and that the reverse expresses determination.) In 1940 the linguist C. C. Fries summed up his historical study of *shall/will* usage: ' . . . after more than a century of discussion of the use of *shall* and *will,* there are no accepted views of what the actual usage of these two words is . . .' In Australia today, as elsewhere, the strong tendency is to favour *will.* The main speech forms have always been the contractions *I'll, we'll, they'll,* etc. which are generally supposed to represent *will* rather than *shall.* The swing to *will* in writing is in keeping with the dominant modern tendency of prose style towards plain, speech-based prose. Does all this mean that *shall* could disappear? No. There is a tendency to retain *shall* in first person questions ('*Shall* we go now?'), in some imperatives ('You *shall!*') and, despite the classroom rule, in first person expressions of determination ('We *shall* fight on the beaches . . .', as Churchill said). (N.B. *Should* is now chiefly used for *ought to;* otherwise, it appears in the first person where it is interchangeable with the much more favoured *would.*)

simpler words We are tempted into the use of long or formal or pompous words chiefly when we write, for then we are not stimulated by a physical presence to keep to speech-simple words. Below is a list of such words, together with simpler equivalents. The list is deliberately brief because it only wishes to make the point that we should always try for a simpler word. (N.B. In some contexts the listed words could be quite appropriate, e.g. *show* is usually preferable to *demonstrate* but it cannot cover all of the uses of *demonstrate.)*

approximately *(about)*
detrimental *(harmful)*
eminently *(highly)*
endeavour *(try)*
envisage *(foresee)*
eventuate *(happen, result)*
facilitate *(help)*
feasible *(possible)*
implement *(carry out)*
inaugurate *(start, begin)*
institute *(start, set up)*
obtain *(get)*
obviate *(avoid, prevent)*
operative *(key, essential)*
predominantly *(chiefly)*
substantial *(big, large)*
utilise *(use)*
virtually *(almost)*

slang Eric Partridge says slang is 'almost undefinable'. It is a very extensive vocabulary that lies on the fringe of and beyond colloquial speech. Very much more numerous than the more or less obscene swear words which are its most distinctive part, slang could add hugely to standard dictionaries if the lexicographers could catch up to it. American English alone could add 100,000 slang words to the 500,000 words in an average dictionary, according to one authority. A relatively small number of slang words are widely diffused throughout society, but most slang is local to a particular group or subculture such as criminals, drug-takers or the military. It imparts a 'with it' feeling of group solidarity and conformity.

Most slang is short-lived and usually yields to new coinages that will briefly enjoy the same ephemeral novelty. Yet slang is the most restlessly inventive frontier of language-change, and a small number of its creations are continually passing into respectable idiom: *bonus* was once stockbrokers' slang; *miss*, in the 17th century, was an epithet only applied to prostitutes; and other words that have fought their way up from slang are *frisky, gambler, conundrum, kidnap, workmanship, quiz, blizzard, slum, broadcast, smog, gimmick, set-up, know-how.* Many qualities of slang militate against its use in writing except at very informal levels; e.g. its limitation to a subculture, its short-lived nature, and its emotion-charged novelty which can discordantly puncture the evenness of tone of most prose writing.

sound (of writing) 'Does it sound right?' This simple question provides the best single method of testing writing. So, consult your 'mind's ear' on whether your sentence is smooth. Be dissatisfied if, even in formal levels of writing, what you 'hear' seems awkward or remote from the vocabulary and rhythms of good conversation. And if you are in doubt, go a step further and read the sentence or passage aloud. This is an old principle. Nearly 2000 years ago the Roman critic Aulus Gellius put it this way: 'If you are either composing verse or writing prose . . . pay no attention to the musty, fusty rules of the grammarians, but consult your own ear as to what is to be said in any given place. What it favours will surely be the best.'

specifics To 'use specifics' is to call concrete things by their true names; it is to *show* what we mean instead of wordily *telling*. A 'specific' flashes a picture, sound, smell, taste, fact, instance, anecdote, or statistic into the mind of a reader. Thus, instead of 'There's a sameness about the bush out west', Henry Lawson writes: 'Draw a wire fence and a few ragged gums, and add some scattered sheep running away from the train. Then you'll have the bush all along the New South Wales western line from Bathurst on . . .' (*In a Dry*

Season). Flannery O'Connor says 'abstractions lead to thinness' — and so we need 'the accurate naming of the things of God'. And Rudolf Flesch in his *How to Express Yourself* says, '*Be specific* is the No. 1 rule of good writing'.

split infinitive In the so-called split infinitive, an adverb occurs between *to* and the infinitive form of the verb, e.g. 'His aim is *to* continually *interrupt* the speaker.' Rigid opposition to any such 'splitting' is still heard, but this ignores several historical facts: (1) infinitives were unselfconsciously 'split' for at least 500 years until early in the nineteenth century when a don't-split rule suddenly became fashionable; (2) this rule arose from regard for Latin, whose infinitive is a single unsplittable word, not English, and it has been fundamentally challenged by several grammarians of English who have argued against regarding *to* as part of the infinitive; (3) nearly all twentieth century authorities have at least gone along with Fowler in saying, '. . . it is better to split one's infinitives than to be ambiguous or artificial'. The whole issue can be treated as one of style not grammar: in most cases *to* is best left beside the infinitive; but there should be no hesitation in writing a split infinitive where it *sounds* natural (e.g. 'An hour's practice a day is good, but *to* really *master* the instrument calls for a great deal more'); and no hesitation whatsoever where splitting means avoidance of ambiguity.

tense consistency Young writers sometimes weave in and out of past and present tenses: 'We started out early. I'm peddling up Piper's Hill when I get a puncture. My mates stopped . . .' A proofreading check for tense consistency is needed. Notice however that the 'historical present' permits present tense to be used to relate past events, so long as it is used consistently: 'Captain Phillip has cause to be worried . . . When good farming land is discovered to the west his relief is great.' Similarly, a universal truth may be expressed in present tense even when the verb in the main clause is past: 'Heraclitus *noticed* long ago that the universe *is* in constant motion'.

that or which? This is a continual problem for a writer: 'The taps *which/that* are dripping need attention.' There is no generally accepted rule to guide our choice of one word or the other, though some people mistakenly believe that *which* is either 'correct' or more elegant and so should be used everywhere. In fact, the strong tendency in modern writing is to favour *that*, probably because it follows what is common in speech-usage. We can, therefore, 'play it by ear': (1) generally preferring *that* to *which;* (2) not using either if the sentence can possibly dispense with a relative pronoun; (3) recognising that *which* is usually preferable in the special case of non-restrictive clauses (i.e. as in 'China, which used to be called Cathay, has an ancient culture': the relative clause is set off with commas, as if in parenthesis, and so does not restrict the meaning of 'China').

till or until *Till* and *until* are generally interchangeable. Both are acceptable at all levels of usage, though the traditional practice of the schools in deprecating all forms of abbreviations may account for a belief held by some people that *till* is less respectable.

too Until recently a convention set this word off with commas in sentences like, 'The policemen, *too,* were frightened by the confrontation'. Now the tendency is to omit the commas, provided no confusion results.

try and or try to? For some time purists have insisted on *try to* and have rejected *try and* as less direct or simply illogical. But *try and* has long been a widely used idiom ('Try and stop it!') and has been used by some leading writers. Several recent usage panels have shown a growing tolerance for *try and,* accepting it in speech and informal writing, but they continue to regard it as unacceptable in formal writing.

T-unit 'Minimal terminable unit', a unit for measuring sentence-writing maturity: a main or independent clause together with all full or reduced clauses attached to it; or, as Carl Bereiter puts it, ' . the minimal unit that can be punctuated as a sentence (whether the writer has punctuated it that way or not)'.

uninterested See DISINTERESTED OR UNINTERESTED?

until See TILL/UNTIL.

upon or on? These words mean the same and are equally acceptable at all levels of usage. *On* is much more common. An American advocate of the closest possible approximation of writing to speech declares: '*Upon* doesn't mean anything different from *on*, and should be shortened to *on*' (Rudolf Flesch, *The ABC of Style)*. But most commentators leave the matter to personal choice. Even if *upon* is a little more formal, there are times when it suits the rhythm or emphasis of our prose.

usage or use? These two words have some overlapping senses, but *use* is preferable when the sense is simply that of *using* or *usefulness; usage* is then saved for the specialised sense of a *manner of using, customary or habitual practice.* (The analogy with *wastage/waste* can help us to discriminate.)

use or utilise? Prefer *use* wherever possible — and it is nearly always possible. *Utilise* becomes apt in the special senses of making productive or profitable what was previously not used or not fully used, e.g. 'That by-product, hitherto sold cheap in a crude form, will be better *utilised* if we install this new process.'

verbless sentences The sentence, by the best-known of its many definitions, is a group of words containing a verb. But to insist on that is to rule out the verbless sentence, as purists once tried to do. Today, this sentence is accepted as a legitimate style device, and many good writers use it. Unfortunately inexperienced writers often use it badly. What is worse, verbless sentences are sometimes written unconsciously and quite wrongly.
(1) *Examples of Wrong Use* (usually corrected by linking with a comma):
Rather intrigued by his success. We made enquiries.
Jones was promoted to manager. *A position that he relished.*
He had not shown up well in the past. *Being inclined to laziness.*
In due course he got into trouble with the Board. *For several misdemeanours, especially overstating production.*
The charges were made by Jackson. *Who is the director in residence.*
(2) *Examples of Effective Use:* Does this mean he should resign? *Not really.*
He could have been as efficient as Ellis. *Well, almost.*
Hitler's 'solution' to the 'Jewish problem' was extermination. *A reversion to barbarism.*
In this way France has solved its main economic problem. *Which is more than can be said of Italy.* (This last example shows a subordinate clause given sentence status.) Verbless sentences usually have a strongly implied ('understood') verbal element.

vogue words See FAD WORDS AND PHRASES.

voice See ACTIVE OR PASSIVE?

whether or not/whether or no In some uses, these are entrenched idioms; but in writing they can often give way to simple *whether.* See also AS TO.

which or that? See THAT OR WHICH?

while/whilst Though *whilst* is sometimes called archaic, and is much less used than *while*, it is not uncommon in Australian writing, particularly in front of some words beginning with vowels, e.g. *whilst* others, *whilst* ignoring. See also AMONG OR AMONGST?

who/whom An old rule asserts, *who* is used of subjects and *whom* of objects. But to apply this rule universally offends against certain longstanding usages. For instance, *who* has been the natural English form since at least the fifteenth century for opening a question, but exponents of the rule have insisted that *whom* should replace *who* in questions like ‘*Who* did you see?’ or ‘*Who* did you speak to?’ A second instance: many distinguished writers (e.g. Churchill, Forster, Maugham) write sentences with structures like these:

‘The Prince, *whom* they thought was away, arrived first’
‘They located the peddlers *whom* the chief said were bandits’
‘There can be no doubt as to *whom* should be invited’
‘We can't recall *whom* it was that she had mentioned’

but exponents of the rule want *who* in all of them. Do you, Reader, have enough grammar to work out why they do? If not, you will easily see that that rule is a source of endless confusion, because its consistent application demands a much deeper knowledge of grammar than even most professional writers possess. Moreover, language authorities themselves are divided about applications of the ‘rule’ (e.g. Gowers would want *who* in the four sentences while Jespersen would defend *whom* as ‘natural’ and ‘idiomatic’, and in that sense acceptable. What a pity those eighteenth century grammarians, drilled in Latin but knowing little about English, took it upon themselves to insist that we should all observe this rule-bound *who/whom* difference. Left to usage these words would probably have become as interchangeable as *on/upon* Then we could have followed guiltlessly what is almost always the best principle for English word-choice and word-order: use whatever sounds best. As a matter of fact, many writers are doing so today with *who/whom* — and nearly all speakers. Shakespeare, of course, never did otherwise.

will or shall? See SHALL OR WILL?

wordiness See REDUNDANCY.

words often confused Here are five sets of words that often cause spelling confusion. They need conscious study and memorisation.

- *it's* means *it is;* e.g. ‘It's time to go’.
  its shows non-human ownership; e.g. ‘The bird flew to its nest’.
- *there* indicates position; e.g. ‘There it is’.
  their shows ownership; e.g. ‘They put on their coats’.
  they're means *they are;* e.g. ‘They're the winners’.
- *to* occurs in sentences like, ‘I go to school’ and ‘I try to learn’.
  too means *also* or *very;* e.g. ‘I too am afraid’, ‘I am too old’.
  two means the number 2; e.g. ‘The two batsmen are at the crease’.
- *who's* means *who is;* e.g. ‘Who's there?’
  whose shows ownership; e.g. ‘Whose pen is this?’ ‘The man whose dog died’.
- *your* shows ownership; e.g. ‘Is this your pen?’
  you're means *you are;* e.g. ‘You're the first to arrive’.

would or should? See SHALL OR WILL?

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N.B. Consult also the glossary.

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